

Are You Doomed to Gain Weight as You Get Older?

While experts cannot agree how much to blame increasing age for weight gain, every middle aged or older person knows maintaining a healthy weight becomes harder every year. This weight gain occurs for many reasons. Weight tends to go up with age because metabolism slows down a little each year, but we eat the same amount of calories. Women seem to have more of a problem with weight gain than men, probably because a woman's body normally has more fat and less muscle than a man's. Muscle uses more calories than fat. People with more muscle tend to burn more calories.

Excess weight is hazardous to one's health. Weight gained in the abdominal area is considered to be the most dangerous.

While a tendency to gain weight is inevitable, weight loss is not. Key strategies for weight loss according to the 629 women in the National Weight Control Registry, average age 44 years, who successfully lost an average of 65 pounds and kept it off for 5.5 years are simple. Reduce calories, fat intake, and the size of food portions, avoid "pig out foods," and increase physical activity levels.

Does controlling calories mean a starvation diet? No. In fact, losing weight slowly, about ½ to 2 pounds a week, by cutting calories and increasing physical activity produces better results than trying to starve. If the body senses it is being starved, metabolism decreases and cravings for sugar and fat increase. Women in the National Weight Control Registry ate an average of five meals a day, and they did not skip meals.

How can you increase your metabolism, increase muscle mass, and decrease abdominal fat? Two kinds of physical activity help. First, an aerobic activity like walking is important. Adding strength training is the second type.

Whether you try to lose weight by reducing calories or increasing physical activity or both, realize that both are easily given up if you go too fast. Slow and easy produces the best results. According to research spending enough time getting ready to make the change and learning about your options produces the best results. Having a partner or group to support your changes works best too.

If you would like the support of others wanting to get started on weight loss and increasing physical activity, call your county Extension agent at _____ for information about Walk Across Texas. Walk Across Texas is an 8 week team walking activity you can do with friends, family, or co-workers. This year, we have added a weight loss program you can do at the same time, if you want. We can mail you week by week instructions for weight loss, or you can sign-up for classes covering the same topics. Whether you want to walk for fitness or to lose weight, you will find Walk Across Texas a great way to get started on the road to better health.