



## How to Fight Obesity—and Win!

Karen Taylor, a Certified Physical Therapist and Certified Personal Trainer with Sarasota, Florida-based MasterCare Physical Therapy, offers this advice for people who have experienced difficulty with weight loss:

1. Focus on the health benefits of exercise first before worrying about weight.
2. Understand the psychological reasons that cause us to eat unnecessarily or even when we're not hungry.
3. Learn to use exercise as a way to reduce stress—a known contributor to obesity.
4. Understand that you cannot lose weight unless you exercise. Resting muscle burns more calories than resting fat. If you diet, but don't exercise you'll have trouble losing weight. If you exercise, you can lose weight even if you don't change your eating habits. If you exercise and modify your eating habits, you will lose weight successfully.
5. Quantify your success in terms of lost inches instead of pounds. Resting muscle not only burns more calories than fat, but also takes up less space. Other important health indicators such as decreased resting heart rate, blood pressure, total circumferential measurements and body fat reveal a lot more about your improving state of health than your weight does.
6. Work with someone who will take the time to understand the reasons why previous weight loss attempts failed. A medically supervised fitness center like Active@AnyAge can help you overcome obstacles and provide the support and encouragement you need.
7. Learn to understand the basics of metabolism. If you begin and maintain an exercise program, you will experience an increase in resting metabolic heart rate, which means you will burn off more calories during your day than you would if you didn't exercise.
8. Once you understand how eating habits and psychological reasons have undermined your previous weight loss attempts, consider adding a nutritionist and a psychologist to your support team. They can work closely with your personal trainer to ensure that your weight-loss solution addresses all of the factors that may contribute to your problem.

Over the past decade, the average American has gained around eight pounds. About 2/3 of the population – 116 million Americans – are considered overweight. Half of them are considered obese, weighing more than 30 pounds over their ideal body. One in 50 adults is considered morbidly obese or overweight by at least 100 pounds.

There's been much talk about the epidemic problem of Americans being too fat. Fast food, a sedentary lifestyle, trendy fad diets and the search for "the quick fix" all add to the mix. Americans spend \$33 billion a year on weight reduction products and services including diet foods, products and programs. Thirty-five to 40% of American women at any given time are trying to lose weight; for men it's 20-24%.

If present trends continue, experts conclude that 50% of Americans could be classified as obese. It's never too late for anyone – even the morbidly obese – to start a physician-approved weight loss program tied to a medically safe exercise regimen and healthy eating habits.

## **Obesity-related Health Conditions**

The direct costs of obesity in the United States is estimated by researchers at LSU is at \$39.3 billion a year or more than 5% of all medical costs.

Obesity is a known risk factor for chronic diseases including:

- Type II diabetes – People who are obese become resistant to insulin, which regulates blood sugar levels. They may develop high blood sugar which causes Type II diabetes.
- Heart disease – Nearly 70% of cardiovascular disease cases are related to obesity. Carrying excess weight does a body no good; the heart works harder.
- High blood pressure – Obesity more than doubles one's chance of developing high blood pressure, (hypertension) which can lead to stroke and damages the heart and kidneys.
- Arthritis/osteoarthritis of weight-bearing joints – The additional weight placed on joints (knees and hips) causes wear and tear and pain and inflammation. Also, strain on bones and muscles in the back leads to disk problems, pain and decreased mobility.
- Respiratory problems/sleep apnea – Fat deposits in the tongue and neck can block air passages. It can result in loss of sleep, daytime sleepiness and even death.
- Infertility – Obesity disrupts normal cycles and functions of male and female hormones and can result in difficulty or inability to conceive.
- Depression – People who are obese deal with constant emotional challenges: failed diets, disapproval from family and friends, remarks from strangers.

## **Losing Weight**

Many obesity experts believe that people who are 20% or more overweight, especially the morbidly obese, can gain significant health benefits from weight loss.

People who are less than 20% above their health weight should try to lose weight if they have the following risk factors:

- Family history of heart disease, diabetes
- Pre-existing conditions such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol levels or high blood sugar levels
- An "apple-shaped" body where weight is concentrated around their abdomens

Healthy diets and exercise are the way to lose and maintain a healthy weight. Strength or resistance training has been found to be the most beneficial exercise program for people of all ages. Not only does it help increase muscle strength and shed unwanted inches, it helps to decrease back pain, increase bone density and reduce arthritic discomfort.

A generally safe rate for weight loss is  $\frac{1}{2}$  -1 pound a week until you reach your goal. Talk to your doctor before starting a diet or exercise program: a medically-supervised exercise program may be the prescription you need to help you change your lifestyle to a healthier one.