

MANAGING YOUR WEIGHT

How to lose weight and keep it off—the healthy way.

HEALTH SERIES | ISSUE 01



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MEASURING UP

Is your weight out of control?

Sounds like a simple question, but many of us are actually unaware of weight fluctuations. In fact, studies show that many people—especially men—underestimate their weight gain¹. This is especially true if you have a pear-shaped body, as it may take a while before you see noticeable weight changes when you look in the mirror.

But ask yourself these questions:

- Do you feel tired constantly?
- Are you experiencing back and joint pains?
- Are you getting more and more midnight cravings for snacks and sweets?
- Do you feel hungry no matter how much you eat?

If your answers are mostly affirmative, then it is highly likely that you have been gaining weight recently. But don't be down on yourself—today's urban lifestyle and modern conveniences make gaining weight almost too easy. This guide provides information on why managing your weight is important, as well as options for you to improve your well-being without drastic changes in your lifestyle.

Different people have different preferences and metrics when it comes to looks and shapes. Is there a more objective method of checking your weight? Health experts have, for more than 40 years, used the Body Mass Index (BMI) to assess weight levels. Your BMI is the number obtained by dividing your weight in kilograms by the square of your height in metres (kg/m^2). Check your number against the chart.

BMI for Kids?

The BMI chart does not apply as strongly to children. They develop at different rates as they grow, and gender plays a part, too. Today, the BMI-for-age chart is based on the age and gender of your child. But even the BMI-for-age is still only an indicator. Seek expert opinion if your child's score on the chart is of concern.

BMI Categories

<18.5	Underweight
18.5–24.9	Normal
25–29.9	Overweight
>30	Obese



While it's a convenient method, BMI doesn't take into account lifestyle or genetic factors. For example, at the same height, a fit, muscular man could be 'fatter' than a couch potato! Asians are also more petite than Caucasians,

so we have higher body fat percentages at lower BMIs. This translates into an increased health risk at lower BMIs.



BMI Alternatives

BMI has its limitations. Fortunately, other methods of measuring body fat have been developed:

	Advantages	Disadvantages
Body Adiposity Index	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hip circumference has been shown to correlate strongly to percentage of body fat Takes into account gender and age 	Does not take into account ethnicity
Waist Circumference Measurement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Waist fat is an indication of internal fat deposits that coat the organs Good for assessing risk of developing chronic diseases Takes into account gender and ethnicity 	Does not take into account body build or age
Waist-to-Hip Ratio	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Used as an indicator of health Used as a measure of obesity A more efficient predictor of mortality Takes into account body structure 	It's unclear if a high WTH ratio is due to a high waist circumference or a small hip circumference

REASONS FOR WEIGHT GAIN



So you've checked your measurements and confirmed what you've suspected all along: your weight is not within the ideal range. Don't be discouraged – know that you're not alone.



Born With It?

If both parents are overweight, their child has a high chance of being so, too. But there are other factors to consider. Weight issues may be caused by lifestyle choices, not genetics. Your genes may make your child predisposed to obesity, but good eating and lifestyle habits make all the difference. If you have children, it's crucial that you be a role model for them.

In fact, overweight and obesity are becoming a—pardon the pun—big problem today. The obesity rate for adult Singaporeans increased from 6.9% in 2004 to 11% last year. In Malaysia, 60% of the population was overweight or obese in 2010; it's the sixth most obese country in Asia.

A common scenario

Why are Asians struggling to manage their weight? The following scenario is becoming an increasingly common occurrence:

You've been staring at your computer screen the entire day. You're too exhausted juggling deadlines and dealing with stress to do any form of exercise when you get home. You have a secret stash of sugary snacks at the office and at home. You can't be bothered to cook fresh meals at home, so you either pack dinner from the food centre or pick up a quick meal tray from the supermarket. You have dinner while watching TV, and before long, it's time for bed.

Does this sedentary lifestyle sound familiar to you? It's a way of life that makes you a prime candidate for becoming overweight or even obese. And that's not just an aesthetic concern: experts warn that it may



Weight Gain & Disease

Your chances of getting these conditions are higher the heavier you weigh:

- Coronary heart disease
- Type 2 diabetes
- Hypertension
- High cholesterol
- Osteoarthritis
- Sleep apnoea
- Respiratory problems

overtake smoking as the No.1 most preventable cause of disease².

Weight and disease

In fact, as your weight increases, so will your risk for certain diseases (see box story). And that's not all. Because of the impressions people have when it comes to being larger, you may be subjected to unfair treatment, and feel more self-conscious, anxious and depressed.

TIP

Eating only healthy food doesn't mean you'll definitely lose weight. At the end of the day, it's the calories consumed versus the calories expended that counts. A healthy but high-calorie diet will still cause weight gain!

A HEALTHIER YOU

If you've gained weight, there's no need to despair. If you really want to do something about it, there are plenty of small steps you can take to manage your weight at your own pace. Read on for some simple but effective solutions that will set the foundations for a better tomorrow for you and your family.



When you wake

Even if you're not a morning person, there are many things you can do to make sure you wake up fresh, bright and breezy.

Water of life You're dehydrated after a long night—your body continues working hard while you sleep, and a simple act like breathing results in water loss. Hydration in the morning gets your digestive system going and kick starts your metabolism.

TIP

Not used to waking up early? Experts say an action becomes a habit when you repeat it 21 times. The 21 Days app is great for those of us with discipline problems—especially at the start. You start by declaring your goal and the app tracks it for you, dropping you reminders and notifications along the way.

Exercise, exercise, exercise

A 20-minute run in the morning actually helps you lose approximately 20% more fat as compared to other times of day, and sets your metabolism right for the rest of the day. Exercise also produces endorphins, which keeps your mood upbeat and allows you to better cope with stress throughout the day.

TIP

Lemons are a great source of Vitamin C, which is an immunity booster and an anti-ageing ingredient. Adding lemon to water increases its alkalinity. People on alkaline diets have been shown to effectively lose weight! This versatile fruit also helps improve digestion by flushing out unwanted materials in your gut.

TIP

A study has shown that people who exercised before breakfast didn't gain weight in the short term even after a high-calorie diet³. These people also ate less throughout the day compared to those who exercised.



Breakfast of champions Never skip breakfast for that extra hour of sleep! Breakfast is the most important meal of the day because a balanced meal keeps the body satisfied and prevents unhealthy food cravings. In fact, a BBC study says that breakfast-eaters tend to have a more balanced diet than those who don't.

Quick and simple Don't skip breakfast even if you're running short of time. Here are healthy recipes that can be easily whipped up:

1. Morning toast with a twist

Drizzle olive oil over toasted wholegrain bread, then slather some mashed avocado on top. Season with salt and pepper.

TIP

A power-packed protein breakfast of eggs and ham is a better choice than something sinful, such as bagel with cream cheese. Protein digests more slowly, so you'll stay full longer and be less inclined to reach into the snack bin.

Why you'll love it:

- Wholegrain bread is healthier than white bread—it's high in fibre and contains nutrients that haven't been destroyed in the refining process.
- Olive oil has plenty of health benefits, including levels of 'good' cholesterol that will lower your levels of bad cholesterol.
- Avocado is a 'superfood': it aids heart health, lowers blood pressure, is high in fibre and chock-full of nutrients.

2. Stuffed celery sticks

Stuff celery sticks full of yummy-but-healthy fillings such as hummus or peanut butter (remember to choose fillings without sugar or oil).

Why you'll love it:

- Hummus is mostly made from chickpeas, which is high in protein without the cholesterol and saturated fats.
- Peanut butter without oil or

sugar is filled with heart-healthy monounsaturated fats. It is a good option for weight watchers because it has a great protein/fibre ratio, which means you'll feel full for longer.

Cereal craze Cereal is a breakfast food busy people love—you can even eat it straight from the box! Some cereals also come fortified with nutrients. Oats is one of the best cereals around. It is low in calorie and fat, and high in fibre, so it keeps you full and energised for hours. However, many such cereals contain high amounts of sugar, which is a sure-fire way to gain weight, so check the nutrition label when you shop.

TIP

To save time, cook your oats in the microwave for two to three minutes on high heat. Preparing them in advance works, too. Cook the night before, refrigerate, and then re-heat in the morning.

Work in progress

Count your lucky stars if your work keeps you on the move. The rest of us who spend a large part of the day sitting down are ideal candidates for weight gain. But it's not all bad if you have a desk-bound job—some tweaks to your office routine will make it easier and simpler to manage your weight.

Burning calories at work Want to take the opportunity to lose weight during the workday? Here are some



calorie-burning activities you can easily incorporate into your routine:

1. Take the scenic route

If taking public transport, get off one or two stops before your destination and walk the rest of the way. If you drive, pick a parking lot that's furthest from your office.

2. Stand more

Standing up burns more calories than sitting down; it also tones your leg muscles. Where possible, try working at your desk standing up. Consider cutting down on e-mails sent to colleagues and walking over to them instead. Taking short walks around the area is also great—you burn more calories and also get to clear your head.

3. Unconventional chairs

Trade your office chair for a fitness ball. This allows you to improve your balance while strengthening your core muscles. Developing muscles increase the rate at which fat burns, so tone up!

4. Make use of things around you to tone up

You can tone up without the need for specialised fitness equipment. A full water bottle works well as a dumbbell—simply fill it up and do bicep curls to train your otherwise stagnant muscles.

Caffeine fix Coffee is a stimulant and there's no denying how helpful it is at keeping us alert. As with many of the good things in life, it's not unhealthy to have coffee—just drink it in moderation. Caffeine is known to help in a number of ways. It:

- Improves brain function
- Lowers the risk of Type 2 diabetes, Alzheimer's and Parkinson's
- Protects the liver
- Gives drinkers a boost of antioxidants

Caffeine can also be found in many commercial weight loss supplements because it raises metabolism and increases the oxidation of fatty acids.

Cut soda out At a whopping 330 calories per can, sodas are a sure-



TIP

Coffee is great for your health and helps you manage your weight, but adding cream and sugar neutralises these effects. These ingredients cause the release of harmful free radicals, which negate the benefits of antioxidants found in coffee.



A double-edged sword

Artificial sweeteners satisfy our sweet tooth with seemingly little consequence, so why is it that people gain weight when they drink diet sodas?

1. We might end up getting complacent from the low calorie-count and end up indulging in food cravings more often.
2. Because of how intense they taste, artificial sweeteners may cause you to shun healthy (but less intensely flavoured) food.
3. Artificial sweetener is addictive, which means the more you have it, the more you can't live without it..

fire way to gain weight; hardly worth it considering its total lack of nutrition as well as ill-effects such as these:

- Adds fat to organs such as the liver
- Greatly increases cholesterol levels
- Shown to induce cancer in tested animals
- Ages the body (thanks to phosphoric acid found in sodas)
- Interferes with the normal functioning of hormones (thanks to a resin called BPA found on the can)

What about diet sodas that contain artificial sweeteners? Forget it. It may seem the healthy choice—sweet treats without any calories—but studies have shown that people who switch to diet sodas were more likely to gain weight than people who drink regular sodas!

Comfort food If your drawer is stockpiled with candies and sweets, you're doing your body an injustice. Pick the right mix of healthy snacks instead and this will help you fight off the stress and calories in a healthy yet delicious way.

TIP *Different foods have differing water content—you'll feel fuller from 100 calories worth of grapes compared to 100 calories worth of raisins.*

You don't have to give up all sweet treats though the key is to pick dark chocolate that's low in sugar. Besides being a delicious source of antioxidants, dark chocolate also stops unnecessary food cravings, which in turn prevents you from overeating. Dark chocolate will also reduce insulin resistance, hence slowing down the rate of weight gain.

Lunch hour

It's hard not to be a foodie in this part of the world. After all, there's plenty of variety to be found.

When lunchtime beckons, many of us make a beeline for the hawker stalls, then suffer the after-effect dubbed 'food coma.' Why do we feel sleepy after a heavy meal? Food intake produces



insulin, which triggers the production of serotonin, a hormone that controls mood and slumber. This is why the more we eat, the sleepier we get—so never overeat if you want to feel alert.

Eat less, feel happier! There's no need to overeat in order to feel satisfied. Neither should you starve yourself, even if you're ultra-conscious of your weight. It's possible to eat less and feel happier if you know what to do at mealtimes.

Water has zero calories, and it fills you up. Drinking lots of water during your meal



Make your hawker food healthy!

Dish	Calories	High in	How to be healthier?
Chicken rice	666	...fats and carbs	Remove the skin from the chicken. Have plain white rice instead of the typical chicken rice, which is cooked in chicken fat. If white rice is not available, have only a half-portion of the chicken rice.
Char kway teow	742	...fat, carbs and sodium	Ask for no lard, no cockles, and try not to finish your noodles—get a side of vegetables to fill you up instead.
Fried bee hoon (vermicelli)	679	...fat, carbs and sodium	Ask for less oil, more vegetables, and no preserved Chinese sausage. Instead of finishing your noodles, share with a friend and get a side of vegetables instead.

makes you feel full quicker, so you will in turn eat less. Just like water, fibre adds volume to food without extra calories. It also slows down the speed at which food leaves your stomach—so you feel full longer. Foods like oranges, beans, and corn are great sources of fibre.

The more quickly your food digests, the faster you'll feel hungry. Cut down on easily digested carbohydrates and eat more protein. The next time you have a sandwich, why not opt for an open-faced sandwich with more meat?

Healthier lunch choices It all boils down to smart choices when it comes to lunch, so look out for these easy-to-find healthier choices:

- **Yong Tau Foo**

Yong tau foo is low in calories, carbohydrates and fat. It's soup-based, which fills you up more than a plate of fried rice would. When selecting ingredients, choose healthier choices such as fresh vegetables and not so much the fried items. A bowl of six to seven items chalks up about 400 calories with noodles and 165 calories without.

- **Economical Rice**

With economical rice, it's almost like having lunch at home: its spread of choices reflects lots of home-style dishes. Choose vegetables and lean meats, and perhaps only a half-portion of rice.

Packed lunches Food establishments frequently use food that is often carbohydrate-heavy and cooked at high heat, which kills nutrients. They may also use palm oil, which is high

TIP

The best way to eat your salad is raw, without dressing. But if you'd like a little flavour boost (and a slippery coating to make it go down easier!), avoid the heavy creams and choose light dressings that are low in sodium and fat, such as oil-and-vinegar.



in saturated fat. All these factors keep prices down, but that's not necessarily good for you. To have full control over what you eat, why not consider preparing your own lunch?

After hours

After a long day at work, the thought of any strenuous activity may be daunting—that's why so many of us turn to the usual dinner-and-drinks combo with our friends, family or colleagues. But you wouldn't know what works until you've tried it, so here are some alternative post-work activities that you can easily engage in:

Take up a sport Organise a team with your colleagues and then hit the courts (or fields or whatever location the activity revolves around). The benefits of exercise are endless: it burns more calories, tones you up, helps your body produce endorphins, and lowers your risk of developing certain diseases. There's another added benefit: nothing fosters camaraderie among colleagues and friends more than playing on a team.

Dance Dancing is a great activity—your body and heart will thank you for all that movement. Many gyms offer dance-based exercise classes such as salsa and zumba. Community clubs and dance schools are the place to go for social and ballroom dances. It takes two to tango, as they say, and dancing is a great way to meet new people or bond with friends—it can even spice up your relationship!

TIP

Avoid alcohol. Other than causing physical and mental impairment, alcohol increases your risk of various diseases. Alcohol is also the first fuel your body burns, which means that until you have burnt away the alcohol you drank, no fat will be burned!

Bedtime

Having enough good quality sleep is vital. The list of benefits is long. If you get enough sleep you're more energised the next day, you feel more focused, your brain works better, and you're less susceptible to stress. Most importantly for weight-watchers, being well-rested means you don't overeat to compensate for the lack of sleep. Improving the



quality of your sleep is as important as maintaining the minimum hours required. With a few tweaks to your routine, a better night's sleep can be ensured.

- **Avoid direct light**

The production of melatonin, a hormone that helps you sleep better, is affected by the presence of direct light. The biggest culprits? Your phones, TVs and laptops, so turn them off at least an hour before you go to bed.

- **Exercise**

In addition to the physical benefits that exercise brings, you'll feel more alert and happy from the hormones that get released. What you may not realise is that a little exercise everyday helps you sleep. Just try not to overexert yourself at night—choose to do your workouts in the day instead.

- **Stop thinking**

A head full of thoughts is going to keep you awake. So before you sleep, try your best to clear your head. Overthinking may cause anxiety too.

TIP

One way to clear your head is via meditation. Assign a quiet space free from distractions as your meditation area. Begin by closing your eyes and taking deep breaths. Focus on your breath to keep distracting thoughts at bay. There are also relaxation videos available for free on the web. Pick the one that works for you.



DIY

Nothing beats the ease of preparing a salad to bring to work. All you need to do is chop up various fresh veggies to your liking, prepare some dressing in a separate container, and toss them together when you're ready for lunch.

Vegetables are some of nature's finest 'superfoods'—so called because they contain high levels of vitamins, minerals and nutrients. Salads are high in fibre and water content, so a little bit goes a long way to feeling full and satisfied for a long time.

The only rule of thumb is to pick from vegetables of different colour groups, but make sure you include dark green, as these vegetables are the healthiest.

YOUR CHILD MATTERS

Now that you've read your options when it comes to managing your weight, what about your children's?

Managing your child's weight

If your child's weight is not ideal, don't worry too much. The truth is, most children don't need to diet the way adults do. Developing children need all the nutrients they can get to keep growing properly.

Being overweight can cause health problems, but drastic measures do more harm than good. A sensible diet coupled with an active lifestyle is what your child needs most, and even overweight children can improve their health (and lose weight) just by eating nutritiously.

Parents can get rather protective of their kids, but they need to recognise that their children are learning the ways of the world as they grow. The best that we can do is equip our precious ones with the knowledge they need to make good decisions on their own, and then be there for them every step of the way.



Q&A

If you're clocking 40 or more hours a week at the office, how can you ensure that your kids are getting the best nutrition possible? Better yet, how do you get them interested in nutrition? We look at some common scenarios and possible solutions:

1. You're in a nuclear family where both parents are working.

Main problem: You don't have enough time to ensure that your children get the

TIP

A great way to ensure that your kids get enough exercise is by enrolling them in physical activities they enjoy. This way, they'll have fun while picking up a skill and keeping fit!

best nutrition from the meals they eat and partake in physical activities that burn off excess energy.

Answer: Your child may not appreciate the taste of light and healthy meals, but



Kid-friendly Recipe

Peanut Butter French Toast Sticks

Ingredients:

8 slices whole-grain bread
crunchy peanut butter
(no oil or sugar added)
honey
4 eggs
¼ cup milk

Directions:

STEP 1 Get your kids started on spreading peanut butter on the bread slices while you whisk the eggs and milk. Fold bread in half, pressing edges to seal.

STEP 2 Have them soak the bread slices in the mixture, a minute on each side. Get your kids' hands dirty!

STEP 3 Cook the sandwiches in a pan until golden brown, with minimal oil.

STEP 4 Hand them the honey and let them drizzle the French toast sticks with it. Serve



exercise a fun part of the day with your young ones and they will look forward to sweating it out with the family. Whether it's kicking a football around in the backyard, rollerblading at a skate park, or jogging at the neighbourhood garden, what's important is to get active... like now!

2. Your child prefers processed and fast food over healthy, 'real' food.

Main problem: Your child will not touch fruits nor vegetables.

Answer: Children are highly adaptive, and getting them to pick 'real' food over processed is not as difficult as it sounds. The best way is to get your children involved in preparing meals as they will be keener to taste the fruits of their own labour. With time, they'll start to love a good, healthy home-made meal! You're not only spending quality time with your kids, but also teaching them how to cook while imparting the value of fresh foods to them. This way, you are equipping your kids with life skills that will go a long way.

healthy food need not always taste like a raw garden. Often, all it takes is the swapping of certain ingredients to make the overall dish healthier. Stocking up on healthy ingredients, like fish, white meat and fresh vegetables, can encourage your children to develop a taste for fresh food. Take time to talk to your children's caregivers about your family's health aims. Explain to them the importance of

certain foods and activities, and show them what's stocked in the larder.

Family time doesn't have to mean going for a meal at a fancy restaurant or an overseas holiday. Consider getting everyone to take part in physical activities to keep your family fit. It's easier to encourage your family to move more when you move with them. Make

POWERED BY TECHNOLOGY

Why not use technology to help you achieve your weight management goals? If you have a smartphone, there are numerous apps that you can download to meet your weight management aims:

iDat

(Free; iOS & Android)

Developed by Singapore's Health Promotion Board, this diet and activity tracker is better suited to Asians because of the variety of food contained in its database (local foods include Indian fish curry, *mee rebus*, fried prawn



noodles and fried *bee hoon*). There is also a workout counter that logs the amount of calories you've shed, how long you've been working out, and uses the GPS function on your phone to keep track of distance logged. You can even keep track of the number of steps you've taken in a day, as well as keep a history of your past workouts for future reference.

Eat This, Not That!

(Free; iOS & Android)

Both you and your kids will enjoy this game. The player has to select what he believes is the healthier of the two options presented. It's surprisingly addictive, and you may be surprised by which foods are actually healthier.



Fooducate Nutrition Scanner

(Free; iOS & Android)

This app scans barcodes and analyses the nutritional content in them and more. It will look into your food item, grade it according to alternatives, offer you healthier choices, and give you additional information—for example, if a particular ingredient is 'natural' or otherwise.

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Menara Great Eastern, 303 Jalan Ampang, 50450 Kuala Lumpur
Company Limited (Reg No. 93745-A)

Any Questions? We are happy to help!

- ☎ General line : (603) 4259 8888
- ☎ Customer service care line: 1-300-1-300-88
- ✉ Email : wecare-my@greateasternlife.com
- 🏠 Website : www.greateasternlife.com/my/en