



# Your heart and weight

## Why your weight matters for heart health

Carrying extra weight can increase the risk of heart disease and other health problems like type 2 diabetes and kidney disease. Maintaining a healthy weight helps protect your heart and overall health. If you are living with heart disease or are at high risk of heart disease, having a healthy weight also helps to keep your blood pressure and cholesterol in a healthy range. It's a win-win!

### Know your numbers

There are different ways to work out if your weight is in a healthy range, such as body mass index (BMI) and waist measurement. Using these measures together can give your doctor the best idea of whether you have a healthy weight.



#### Body mass index

BMI uses your height and weight to estimate body size. A BMI above the healthy range may mean a higher risk of heart disease and other health problems. Want to know your BMI and what it means? Visit [heartfoundation.org.au/bmi-calculator](http://heartfoundation.org.au/bmi-calculator)

#### Waist measurement

BMI isn't perfect, so your doctor may also measure your waist. A waist measurement indicates how much fat is carried around your middle. Together with your BMI, your waist measurement gives a clearer picture of your health risk. Want to know how to measure your waist? Visit [heartfoundation.org.au/your-heart/waist-measurement](http://heartfoundation.org.au/your-heart/waist-measurement)

### Get support from your doctor or other healthcare professional

There's lots of support available to help you achieve a healthier weight and protect your heart. Your doctor is a great place to start. They can:



- support you to make healthy behaviour changes like moving more and eating well
- assess your risk factors for heart disease and put a plan in place to manage them
- prescribe weight loss medications, if needed
- refer you to specialists and other healthcare professionals, like a dietitian, exercise physiologist or a mental health professional
- assess whether you might benefit from weight loss surgery, and refer you to a specialised weight loss clinic or bariatric surgeon.



Nutrition



Physical activity



Weight loss medications  
*(some people)*



Weight loss surgery  
*(some people)*

### Healthy eating

Following a heart-healthy eating pattern is important for your heart and to help manage your weight. Find out more about a heart-healthy eating pattern: [hrt.how/eating](http://hrt.how/eating). In some cases, your doctor might recommend reducing your energy intake. They may also refer you to an Accredited Practising Dietitian for more support.



#### A heart-healthy eating pattern includes:



plenty of vegetables, fruits and wholegrains



a variety of healthy proteins like legumes, nuts, seeds, fish and seafood, and smaller amounts of eggs and lean meats



unsweetened milk, yoghurt and cheese (reduced fat for some people)



healthy fats and oils like avocados, olives, nuts and seeds and their oils



herbs and spices for flavour instead of salt

## Physical activity

Being active is great for your heart, mind and overall wellbeing. Talk to your doctor about building up activity safely.



### Aim for:

- at least 30 minutes a day of activity that makes you breathe faster and puff a little
- 2-3 sessions of resistance activity a week (e.g. using weights or resistance bands).

### Top physical activity tips:



Move more, sit less! Try to break up long periods of sitting by standing up or stretching regularly throughout the day.



Mix it up with different activities you enjoy. Dancing, cycling, swimming or walking all count.



Aim for at least 7,000 steps a day. Join your local Heart Foundation Walking group. Find out more: [heartfoundationwalking.org.au](http://heartfoundationwalking.org.au)

## Weight loss medications

Your doctor might recommend weight loss medications alongside healthy behaviour changes. In addition to weight loss, some of these medications can benefit your heart health. Most are taken weekly or daily as an injection. Your doctor will talk with you about whether these medications are right for you, including possible side effects and costs.



### If you are prescribed weight loss medications, it's important to:



be aware of side effects. Stomach or bowel side effects are common, especially when starting treatment, but they can be managed with the right support.



protect your muscle mass. Aim to eat enough protein and include strength or resistance-based activities to help maintain muscle as you lose weight.



plan for the long term. Weight regain is common after stopping these medications. Healthy eating and regular physical activity can help maintain weight loss.

## Weight loss surgery (bariatric surgery)

For some people, your doctor might recommend seeing a specialist to discuss weight loss surgery. This surgery can be very effective for long-term weight loss and improving heart health. Your specialist will talk through the options, benefits and risks.



## Long-term care and follow up

To help you maintain a healthy weight, and to keep your heart healthy, it's important to have regular check ups with your doctor.



Your doctor will want to...	Why it matters...
regularly check your weight and adjust your treatment plan if necessary.	ensures you're staying on track and supports long-term weight goals.
monitor and manage your heart disease risk factors.	to maintain your heart health in the long term.
monitor your diabetes, kidney and liver health.	protect your overall health and reduce complications.
screen for any complications or side effects following weight loss surgery (if you've had it).	finds potential problems early, supporting your recovery and ongoing health and wellbeing.