



Winning the War on Weight



There is some good news in the war on weight:

Recent studies from the National Center for Health Statistics (January 2010) have shown that obesity in the United States may be stabilizing instead of increasing. But the rates of obesity remain high—68 percent of U.S. adults are overweight or obese, and almost 32 percent of school-aged children and adolescents are at or above the 85th percentile of body-mass index (BMI) for age.¹

With almost seven out of 10 adults overweight, the consequences of obesity are far-reaching, affecting not only ourselves, but our friends, neighbors, co-workers, family members and children. Excess weight is linked to type 2 diabetes, heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, cancer, joint disease, sleep apnea, asthma and other chronic conditions. A recent study of the *Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System* showed that obesity has a larger effect on disease and quality of life than smoking (although smoking has a greater impact on death rates).²

Taking Small Steps

There's more good news: Winning the war on weight doesn't require an "all or nothing" approach. Losing just five to 10 percent of your weight can delay or prevent many chronic conditions. Begin by knowing your numbers.

If you haven't weighed yourself lately, take the first step and step on the scale. Learn about your weight risk by determining your Body Mass Index (BMI). The greater your BMI, the greater your health risks. You can find several BMI calculators online. The National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute has a calculator available at: www.nhlbisupport.com/bmi. You can find out your child's BMI by using the calculator at <http://apps.nccd.cdc.gov/dnpabmi/>.

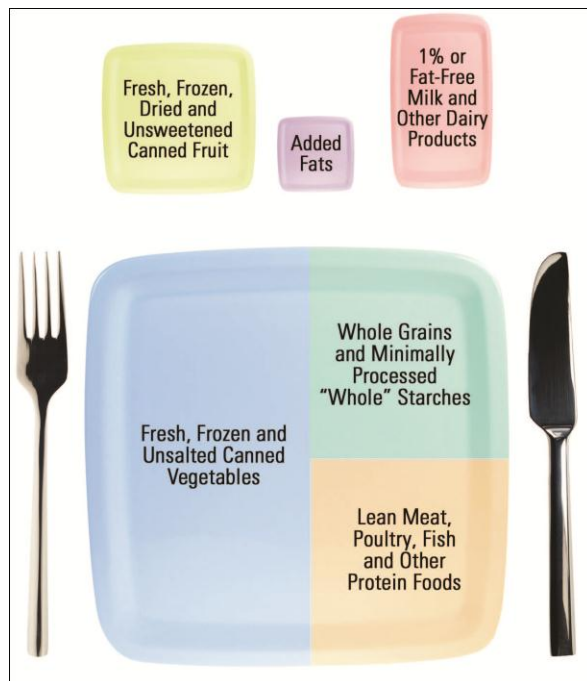
Defining Your Battle Plan

Most experts agree: You need to launch a comprehensive campaign to win the battle of the bulge. Speak with your health care provider about resources in your area or special considerations if you have health issues. Or call a Highmark Health Coach at 1-888-BLUE428 (1-888-258-3428) for advice, guidance, resources and encouragement.

Keep in mind a few basics to find an approach that works for you:

- **Set a goal of a gradual weight loss of about 1 to 2 pounds per week.** While it's motivating to see the numbers drop on the scale, it's important to remember that you didn't gain weight overnight. Strive for slow, steady progress—it adds up quickly. Speak with your health care provider or a registered dietitian about setting a goal that's right for you.

- **Choose a low-calorie eating plan that offers a wide range of healthy foods.** Avoid plans that totally exclude certain food groups or categories of foods. It's difficult to adhere to these types of plans over time. You'll get bored easily and stray from your goals if your plan lacks variety. Remember the basics of balanced nutrition: Choose foods from all the food groups, including whole grains, fruits and vegetables, lean meats and protein and fat-free dairy products. Use our *Plate Planner* (to the right) to ensure your plan is balanced.



- **Reduce your food intake by 250 to 500 calories per day.** *The fact is: You can't lose weight without cutting calories.* Read labels to learn more about calories—it's like looking at the price tag when shopping to get the best deal. Compare foods and look for lower calorie options of your favorite foods. Use the "serving size" on the Nutrition Facts food label to control portions. If foods come in their own packages (like fruits and vegetables), don't worry about the calories—just eat them.

- **Learn to be more physically active—every day.** There is no "perfect" exercise for weight reduction. The perfect exercise program is one that fits into your lifestyle and one that you find enjoyable and will stick with. *Another fact is: You can't lose weight without regular exercise.* Begin gradually and strive to burn 250 to 500 calories every day through physical activity (about 30 to 60 minutes). Speak with your health care provider before beginning an exercise program if you are over age 40 or have health concerns.

- **Educate yourself about healthy eating and physical activity.** Becoming an expert will help you avoid the allures of quick fixes and diet fads. Highmark members can visit www.highmarkbcbs.com and discover practical information, tools and programs for weight management. Log in and click on the "Health Topics" tab. Or participate in one of our online lifestyle improvement programs for a convenient, personalized approach to improving your weight or nutrition: HealthMedia® Balance™, Nourish™ or Overcoming™ Binge Eating. Log in and click on "Your Health," followed by "Improve Your Health," to enroll in the program of your choice.

- **Find support to help keep you on track before, during and after.** When it comes to weight management, success is often found in numbers. Get the whole family involved, or team up with a friend or co-worker. Exchange ideas and support via daily text messaging, emails, phone calls or online chats. Use a social networking site, like *Facebook* or *MySpace*, to establish and share ongoing ideas, successes, recipes, strategies, goals and challenges with friends, family and your weight management "team".

- **Become a wellness role model.** Helping others build healthy eating and fitness habits will help motivate you to "keep up the good work." Everyone can benefit from improving their lifestyle habits, so be proud to share your successes. When we work together to *win the war on weight*, we'll experience victory one person, one family, one community at a time. Now is the time.

Citations: ¹ *Journal of the American Medical Association*, online, Jan. 13, 2010. ² *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, news release, Jan. 5, 2010

