Americans continue to struggle with weight

The most recent health statistics show that a growing number of Americans are carrying excess weight. Just under 40 percent of U.S. adults were considered obese in 2015-2016, according to research from the National Center for Health Statistics. Sixteen years ago, 30.5 percent of adults were obese. The prevalence of obesity is increasing in young people as well. The most recent data shows that 18.5 percent of youth are obese. That figure was 13.9 percent in 1999-2000.

The increase is a concern, as obesity contributes to health conditions such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and certain types of cancer. There’s no simple answer to reversing the trend. Diet, physical activity levels, and medication all play a role in a person’s weight. In addition, the availability of healthy food and physical activity options, as well as food marketing and promotion, make an impact.

Practicing healthy behaviors, including engaging in regular physical activity and making healthy food choices, can help a person reach and remain at a healthy weight.

Don’t overlook exercise

Physical activity plays an important role in weight management, as calories that aren’t used by your body are stored as fat. To maintain a steady weight, the number of calories you’re taking in should be in balance with the number you’re burning.

The 2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans recommend that adults get at least 150 minutes of moderate aerobic exercise each week, such as brisk walking. They should also do muscle-strengthening activities on two or more days each week.

People who successfully keep weight off usually have 60 to 90 minutes of moderate physical activity most days of the week, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention notes. This can be broken into smaller segments, such as 20 to 30 minutes of walking.

Three eating habits to break this week …

Skipping breakfast. Eating a healthy breakfast (try oatmeal, hard boiled eggs, or a smoothie) can help you avoid the pitfall of overeating later in the day.

Eating too quickly. Take time to enjoy the taste and textures of your food. Put down your fork between bites. Pay attention to how you feel, so you realize when you’re full.

Eating when you’re not hungry. Be careful not to automatically reach for food when you see a candy dish, or because you’re bored or stressed. Ask yourself why you want to eat.

… and three to follow

Reach for fruits and vegetables. They’re filling and low in fat and calories.

Replace food with an activity. If you find yourself snacking when you’re bored or anxious, go for a walk or call a friend.

Plan meals. Planning ahead helps ensure that you have healthy foods on hand and that your meals are well-balanced.

By the numbers

It takes a deficit of about 3,500 calories to lose a pound of body fat. To lose a pound in a week, avoid or burn an extra 500 calories a day.
Excess weight can increase your risk of cancer

Here’s a health fact that may surprise you: Your weight plays a role in your cancer risk level.

Weighing more than recommended can cause changes in the body that lead to cancer, but more than half of Americans don’t realize that obesity and being overweight are associated with this disease, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports.

There are a number of possible explanations for the link between obesity and cancer. One reason could be that people who are obese often have low-level inflammation. Over time, this can damage a cell’s DNA and lead to cancer.

Obesity can also bring increased levels of insulin in the blood, which can contribute to colon, kidney, and other cancers.

In addition, excess amounts of estrogen can be produced by fat tissue, and high levels of estrogen have been linked to an increased risk of breast and ovarian cancer.

Maintaining a healthy weight is one of the most important things you can do to lower your risk of cancer. Americans are heavier today than they were several decades ago, and data show that most types of obesity-related cancers increased from 2005 to 2014.

Studies have also shown that people who gain less weight during adulthood have a lower risk of certain types of cancers, including colon and kidney cancer.

Watch out for portion inflation

Americans’ waistlines have been expanding over the past 20 years — and so have portion sizes.

Restaurants routinely serve considerably more food than a person needs at one meal, and a snack in the vending machine often contains more than one serving.

Research shows we unintentionally consume more calories when faced with larger portions. This means taking in many more calories than we need each day, especially if the larger portions are for high-calorie foods.

These extra calories add up quickly; eating just 150 calories a day more than you burn can lead to an extra 10 pounds in a year.

Although some factors, like family history, are out of your control, you can make positive lifestyle changes to maintain a healthy weight. Try these tricks to right-size your portions:

**Play the waiting game.** Try a smaller portion first, then wait about 20 minutes to give your brain a chance to get your stomach’s message that you’re full.

**Save some for later.** Take half of your restaurant entrée home.

**Cook more often at home.** This gives you more control over portion size. Try using a smaller plate to help control your portions.

Cancers linked to weight

Cancers related to being overweight or obese:

- Meningioma (cancer in the tissue covering the brain and spinal cord)
- Adenocarcinoma of the esophagus
- Kidneys
- Uterus
- Ovaries
- Thyroid
- Breast
- Liver
- Gallbladder
- Upper stomach
- Pancreas
- Colon and rectum

Your coffee may cost more than you think

Gone are the days when a plain cup of coffee, with perhaps a cube of sugar and a hint of creamer, was the norm.

Today’s fancy coffee drinks look and taste great, but they come with a hidden cost: loads of extra calories.

While a plain cup of coffee has less than 5 calories and no fat, many specialty coffee drinks are dressed up with sugar, whipped cream, and syrups that add calories.

To avoid taking in too many calories in your daily cup of coffee, check the calorie count. A 12-ounce coffee drink could add upwards of 200 calories to your day.

Next month: Cholesterol