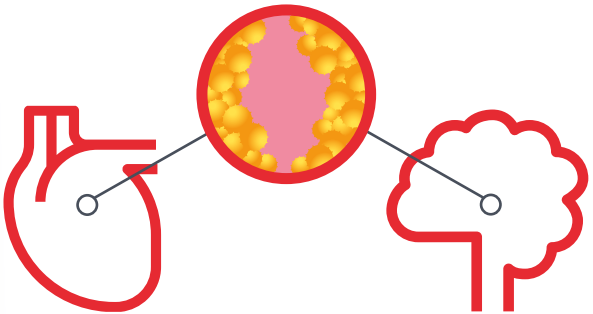
UNDERSTANDING YOUR WEIGHT

to reduce your risk of heart and circulatory diseases

Weight and heart and circulatory diseases

This leaflet is for people who are at increased risk of heart and circulatory diseases because of their weight.

Heart and circulatory diseases kill 1 in 4 people in the UK. Being overweight can lead to fatty material building up in your arteries (the blood vessels that carry blood to your organs). If the arteries that carry blood to your heart get damaged and clogged, it can lead to a heart attack. If this happens in the arteries that carry blood to your brain it can lead to a stroke.



Artery in the heart getting blocked

Artery in the brain getting blocked

Carrying weight around your middle can also affect the way your body works. It can make it harder for your body to use a hormone called insulin, which regulates your blood glucose (sugar) levels. This can lead to Type 2 diabetes. Having high levels of glucose in your bloodstream for a long period of time can damage your arteries and increase your risk of heart and circulatory diseases.

Being a healthy weight is about watching your portion sizes, gradually swapping some unhealthy items for healthier ones and moving about more. It's important not to view these changes as a short-term diet. It's a permanent lifestyle change that will protect you from serious illness.

Why is weight important?

Being overweight can lead to other conditions that also increase your risk of heart and circulatory diseases.

High blood pressure: By carrying extra weight and having more body fat, your heart has to work harder to move blood around your body, increasing your blood pressure. This puts strain on your heart and arteries and can damage them, increasing your chances of a heart attack or stroke.

High cholesterol: Being overweight means you are more likely to have high cholesterol, which can clog up your arteries and damage them, increasing your risk of heart and circulatory diseases.

Diabetes: Being overweight increases your chances of developing Type 2 diabetes. Studies show that fat around your middle releases chemicals that make your body less sensitive to insulin. Insulin regulates your blood glucose levels. Being less sensitive to insulin will cause your blood sugar to rise.

Understanding body fat

Everyone needs some fat to stay healthy. But too much fat, particularly around the waist, puts your health at risk.

We have different types of fat in the body. Subcutaneous fat sits just below the skin, so we can often feel it. This is the kind of fat people tend to worry about. But actually it's the hidden fat wrapped around your organs, called visceral fat, that's the bigger health risk.

Visceral fat affects how your hormones work and can:

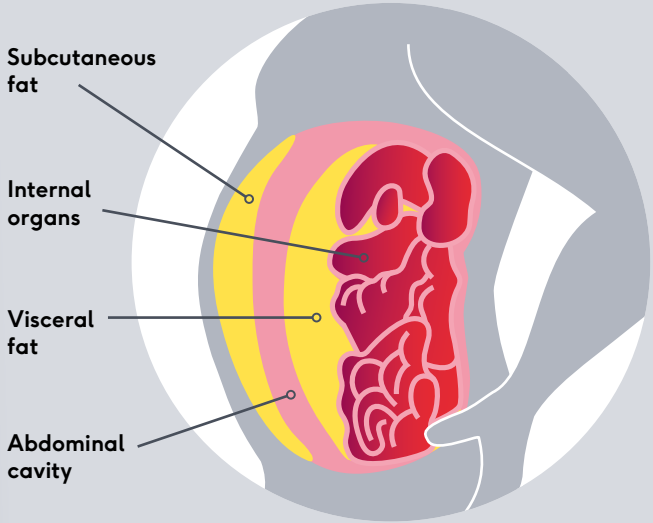
- Raise your blood cholesterol
- Increase your blood pressure
- Reduce your body's ability to use insulin, increasing your risk of developing Type 2 diabetes.

A larger waist measurement is often a sign if you have too much visceral fat. You can reduce visceral fat by eating healthily and being physically active.

Visceral fat

Visceral fat is stores around and between your internal organs in your abdomen.

This type of fat increases your risk of heart and circulatory diseases and Type 2 diabetes.



How do I know if I'm overweight?

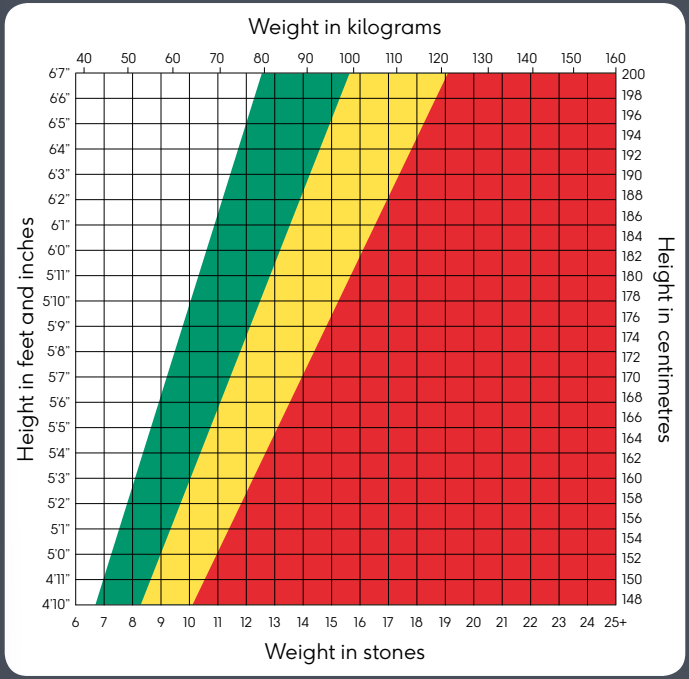
Your weight and body shape impact your risk of heart and circulatory diseases. Everyone should keep an eye on their weight to make sure it doesn't put their health at risk.

If you're concerned about your weight, the first step is to weigh yourself and measure your height. If you don't have scales and a tape measure – your GP or practice nurse, will be able to help you.

When you know your height and weight, follow the lines on the chart to find out your Body Mass Index (BMI). If you are in the **overweight** or **obese areas**, it means that you are putting your health at risk. If this is the case, book an appointment with your GP to talk about losing weight.

GO Work out your BMI at bhf.org.uk/bmi

Find out your BMI



Underweight
BMI below 18.5

Ideal weight
BMI 18.5-24.9

Overweight
BMI 25 – 29.9

Obese
BMI 30+

Understanding calories

The amount of energy in food or drink is measured in calories.

We take energy – or 'calories' – into our bodies by eating and we burn energy or calories by being active. When we eat and drink more calories than we use up, our bodies store the excess calories as body fat. If you keep eating more calories than you use up, you will start to gain weight.

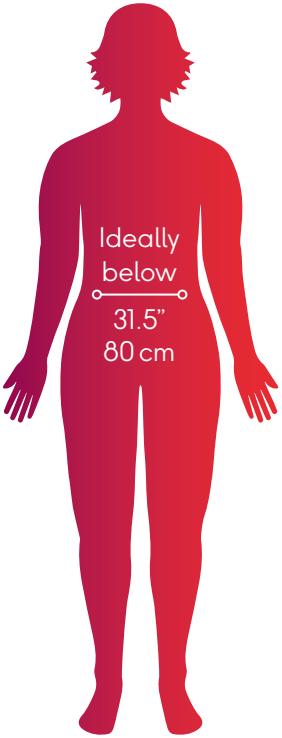
= gain weight

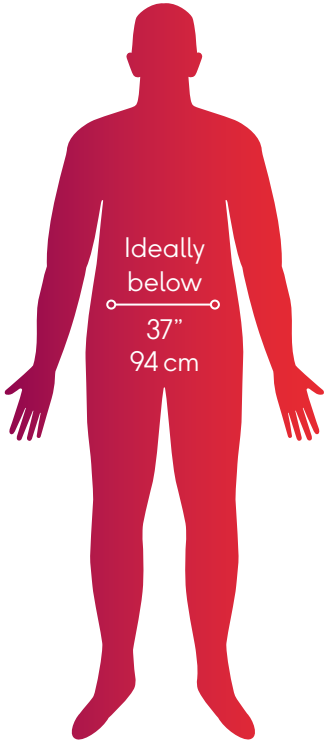
You could be eating more calories than you need without realising, just by eating larger portions than you need or by having a daily pudding and not burning the extra calories off by being active.

Know your body shape

People who are 'apple' shaped (carry excess weight around their middle) are at higher risk than those who are 'pear' shaped (carry weight around hips, thighs and bottom) because the fat sits around their organs.

People often measure the wrong part of their waist. It's not where your trousers sit. To measure your waist, measure between the bottom of your ribs and hips and hold a tape measure around the area just above your belly button. It should fit snugly, but do not squeeze. It won't be the same as your jean size or trouser measurement.





Ideally a man's waist measurement should be below 37 inches and a woman's should be below 31.5 inches.

What to do next?

If your measurements are higher than they should be, it's time to take action. You can make changes to bring your weight down. Focus on what you can do to reduce your risk of heart and circulatory diseases.

Get started

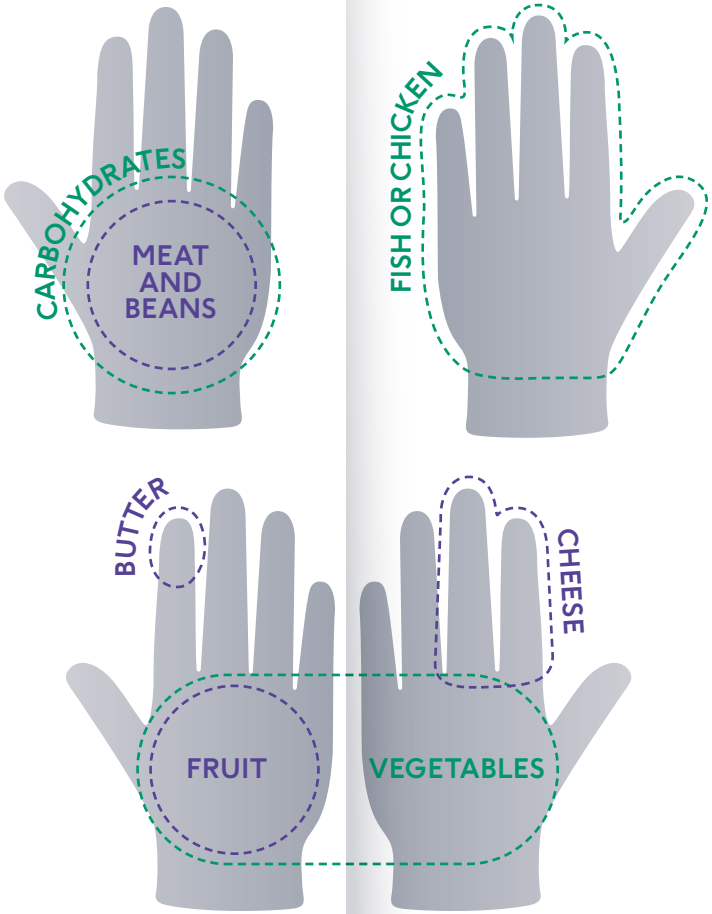
To lose weight, you may need to change your eating habits. The best way to do this is to start with small changes; as they add up, you could see some big results.

Get portion sizes right

It's important to eat the right amount of food. If you're eating too much then you're likely to gain weight, even if you're eating healthier foods.

Using your hands is an easy way to measure food portions.

Try serving food on smaller plates as this can also help you to eat less – the same amount of food on a smaller plate looks bigger and more filling.



- Portions of carbohydrates like pasta, rice or a potato should be the size of your fist.
- Meat and beans should be the size and width of your palm.
- A portion of chicken or fish is the size of your whole hand.
- A portion of butter is the size of your fingertip and cheese should be less than the length and depth of two fingers.
- A fruit portion sits in the palm of one hand and vegetables across two hands.

Eat a healthier diet

Healthy eating for weight loss doesn't mean counting calories or cutting out food groups. It means eating more of the foods that are good for us like fruit, vegetables and wholegrains and less of foods and drinks high in fat and sugar.

Here are some healthy swaps you could make today:

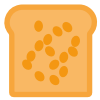
Crisps →

A small handful of unsalted nuts

Fried egg →

Boiled egg

Cheese on toast →



Beans on toast

Look at food labels

Always read the label on packaged food. Try to eat mostly green and ambers. The label should have guidance on portion size too.

	FAT	SUGARS	SATURATES	SALTS
LOW Healthier choice	3g or less	5g or less	1.5g or less	0.3g or less
MED OK most of the time	3.1g to 17.5g	5.1g to 22.5g	1.6g to 5g	0.3g to 1.5g
HIGH Just occasionally	More than 17.5g	More than 22.5g	More than 5g	More than 1.5g

All measures as 100g

GO bhf.org.uk/healthyeating

Move more

Being active reduces your risk of heart and circulatory problems. It strengthens the heart, helps keep your blood pressure steady and helps to manage your weight.

Exercise uses up the energy from the food you eat. When you use up more energy than you eat, you'll burn fat. But if this energy doesn't get used up, then it is stored in our bodies as fat.

Aim for 20–30 minutes of activity a day. Swimming, cycling or walking quickly for at least 10 minutes at a time will help.

Try to build moving about into your day-to-day routine – even cleaning or walking up the stairs counts.

GO bhf.org.uk/stayingactive

bhf.org.uk

Heart transplants. Clot busting drugs. Pacemakers. Breakthroughs born from visionary medical research. Research you fund with your donations.

Heart and circulatory diseases kill 1 in 4 people in the UK. They cause heartbreak on every street. But if research can invent machines to restart hearts, fix arteries in newborn babies, build tiny devices to correct heartbeats, and give someone a heart they weren't born with – imagine what's next.

We fund research into all heart and circulatory diseases and their risk factors. Heart attacks, heart failure, stroke, vascular dementia, diabetes and many more. All connected, all under our microscope. Our research is the promise of future prevention, cures and treatments.

The promise to protect the people we love.
Our children. Our parents. Our brothers.
Our sisters. Our grandparents. Our closest friends.

You and the British Heart Foundation.
Together, we will beat heartbreak forever.

Beat heartbreak forever.