

Safe and Successful Weight-management Programs

How to Choose

A healthy weight is important for overall well-being. When you keep a healthy weight, you can reduce the risk of many health conditions. This includes at least 13 different types of cancer: post-menopausal breast cancer, colorectal cancer, kidney (renal cell) cancer, endometrial cancer, thyroid cancer, pancreatic cancer, multiple myeloma, liver cancer, ovarian cancer, adenocarcinoma of the esophagus, upper stomach cancer, gallbladder cancer, and meningioma (a type of tumor in the brain).

To keep a healthy weight and lower your risk for health conditions, a weight-management program may help. It can be hard to choose a weight-management program. You may not know what to look for or what questions to ask. Use these tips to find a program to help you lose weight safely and keep the weight off over time.

A weight-management program that is safe and helpful should have:

- **An evidence-based approach:** Choose a program supported by scientific research that has been proven to help reach steady weight loss. These programs are more likely to help you lose weight in a healthy way and keep it off.
- **Slow weight loss goals:** Try not to choose a program that promises fast weight loss or extreme diets. These programs may not be healthy and are hard to keep up. Programs that involve slow and steady weight loss (no more than 2 pounds per week) may be easier to maintain. It is important to note you may lose weight faster at the beginning of a program.
- **Balanced and nutritious diet:** A good weight-management program should include a balanced and varied diet, with a focus on whole foods, fruits, vegetables, lean proteins and whole grains.
- **Physical activity:** A complete weight-loss program should include recommendations for regular physical activity based on your fitness level and abilities.
- **Behavioral piece:** Successful programs include a behavioral piece to address lifestyle changes that need to be made.
- **Ongoing feedback, monitoring and support:** You should receive regular feedback and support from the program to help you stay on track and make progress towards your weight-management goals. This should take place for at least 6 months.
- **Credibility:** A quality program will have trained providers such as certified fitness professionals and health coaches, registered dietitians, licensed psychologists or counselors and licensed medical professionals such as doctors and registered nurses.
- **Custom:** Successful weight management programs consider your needs, goals, lifestyle and preferences to create a plan that is customized for you.

Many weight-management programs are offered online (not in-person). If you consider an online or virtual weight-management program, make sure it includes the following:

- Planned lessons offered each week online
- Support for your personal goals
- Tools to check and track your progress, such as food journal or a physical activity tracker to help you track eating habits and physical activity
- Regular feedback from a counselor or coach on goals, progress and results
- Social support from chat rooms, social media or online meetings

A weight management program may **not** be ideal if it:

- Promises that you will lose more than 2 pounds per week. Losing more than this may lead to a very strict diet, which is hard to follow long-term.
- Cuts out major food categories such as fat or carbohydrates, uses diets for certain conditions such as gluten or dairy-free or uses diets that have you eat or not eat certain foods at certain times.
- Makes you buy the program's foods or supplements instead of teaching you how to make healthier choices at a regular grocery store
- Seems hard to follow and does not fit your lifestyle
- Does not have a medical doctor, registered dietitian, certified fitness professional guiding the program.

Any of these red flags could mean that the program does not have your best interest in mind, is not safe or will not give you long-term success.

It is important to gather as much information as possible about the program before you decide to join. This way, you can make an informed decision that meets your needs and preferences.

Talk with your doctor or a member of your health care team before you start any weight-management program. This is to make sure it is safe and right for you.

If a weight-management program does not help you reach a healthy weight and your weight affects other medical conditions, such as diabetes or high cholesterol, it is important to talk with your health care team about the best way to manage your weight. They may suggest other treatments such as medicines or surgery to help with weight loss.