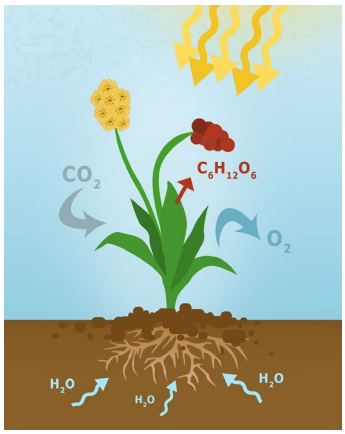
People living in bigger bodies
And weight loss

Consult your GP about all the information in this handout

People living in bigger bodies can experience pressure from others, including health professionals, to lose weight. Here are a few issues to consider informed by science and evidence.

Dietary restriction

There are many different opinions you can find about restricting your nutritional intake to lose weight, but here are some of the main evidence-informed findings:



- Some scientists talk about **set point weight** - your metabolism, hormones and brain will adjust to maintain that weight. People may have naturally higher or lower set weights than others. Set points can be impacted by genetics, aging, and hormonal shifts. Your set point weight can rise but rarely lower. It is easier to maintain your set point weight because your body wants to remain there – not lose weight.
- Few people can sustain significant weight loss through dieting – only 10% to 20% of your original weight might be lost in this way.
- As many as 90% of people who lose weight through dieting regain all if not more over 2 to 5 years.
- The more you reduce your calorie intake to lose weight, the more your metabolism compensates by slowing down to maintain your current weight, called metabolic compensation. It kicks in to preserve and store fat for future energy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Dieting and an eating disorder

If you've had an eating disorder, dieting places you at risk of relapsing - any attempts at weight loss need to be supervised by qualified health professionals. A dietitian who understands eating disorders is a wise investment.

If you are looking for a dietitian who has been trained to work with people who have or have had eating disorders, you can find them on https://connected.anzaed.org.au/

Health at every size

Health at Every Size advocate that anybody of any size can be healthy. Healthy lifestyle habits (exercise, eating as per the Real Food Guide) are a better predictor of mortality than body mass index. For more on this approach see:

https://edfa.org.au/education/what-is-haes/

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Comorbid medical problems

If you are facing critical medical problems, your healthcare team may suggest gastric bypass or bariatric surgery. Since these surgeries come with significant risks, it is crucial to carefully weigh the potential benefits and complications with your healthcare professionals. If you struggle with a negative relationship with food or your body, it's important to address these issues before considering surgery.

Some long-term risks for patients include:

- Dumping syndrome, a condition that can lead to symptoms like nausea and dizziness
- Low blood sugar
- Malnutrition
- Vomiting
- Ulcers
- Bowel obstruction
- Hernias

Exercise

Exercise is key to good health regardless of body size. Even small amounts of exercise like 10 minutes a day is better than none. By shifting the focus to performance and smaller goals instead of weight loss, fitness goals can be more sustainable and attainable.

Although cardio shows plenty of evidence of being helpful for health, in the end the best exercise for you is one you can maintain in the long term, and that fits your needs and desires. When fitness is more enjoyable, including doing it in a way that increases chances for social engagement, it becomes more achievable. Therefore, if the goal is to increase physical activity engagement, fitness recommendations should be made in a way that is more fun for you and fits your lifestyle.

Glucagon-like peptide-1 receptor agonist medications (GLP-1s) for weight loss

GLP-1s are a relatively new medication prescribed to manage blood sugar levels in people with type 2 diabetes and may be prescribed for weight loss. Fifteen to 60% of weight loss is due to the body "feasting" on your lean tissue (muscle), speeding up muscle loss; once you are off the drug, the weight will go back on, typically as fat. It is intended for long-term (lifetime) use, but many people find that they cannot afford this. We don't really know a lot about potential long-term side effects yet - these are powerful chemicals that works on the brain with information emerging about possible adverse side effects e.g., it can make vision worse; causes ongoing problems with nausea, constipation, uncomfortable fulness, diarrhea. For helpful information on this topic, see: https://sizeinclusivemedicine.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/MSSI-GLP1-Informed-Consent-10.pdf