



衛生署
Department of Health



World Cancer
Research Fund
Hong Kong

世界癌症研究基金會(香港)

The Truth About Weight and Cancer





Are you aware of that?

Have you ever heard of a friend being diagnosed with cancer? Do you agree that cancers seem increasingly common nowadays? Do you know that up to a third of the most common cancers can be prevented? Do you know how?

While tobacco use is the single most common cause for all cancers in developed areas (including Hong Kong) (accounting for about 30%), the latest World Health Organisation (WHO) report estimated that dietary factors can account for approximately the same amount of cancers, *making diet second as a preventable cause of cancer.*

Believe it or not, it is the fact (fat)!

Reports from WHO as well as the Second Expert Report by the World Cancer Research Fund (WCRF) Global Network – *Food, Nutrition, Physical Activity, and the Prevention of Cancer: a Global Perspective*, have pointed out the **linkage between overweight, obesity and cancers** of breast, bowel, mucosa lining the womb, kidney, pancreas and oesophagus. In HK alone, that represents almost 8,000 new cases of cancer each year.

Why fat? Thanks to effort made by researchers, it is now known that fat cells constantly secrete a wide variety of hormones and growth factors into the bloodstream that urge cells to grow and divide at an accelerated rate. Obese and overweight individuals, who have more fat cells than individual of healthier weight, are therefore more likely to develop cancers of various types when more cell divisions with random mutations occur.

The harsh truth is, unless we learn to eat sensibly and exercise more, the health consequences will seriously affect our lives and overwhelm our health care costs. Even worse, more and more of our Hong Kong children are overweight or obese (from one in six children in 1997 to one in five in 2009), which has become an epidemic and public health emergency.



Are you at risk of cancer? Start monitoring your weight!

How should you determine if you are at risk? Most of us know when we gain weight, our clothes will no longer fit. The mirror becomes an irritating reminder, and the bathroom scales are permanently hidden under the bed. Many of us, however, tend to overlook these signs. Fortunately, science currently offers two methods of assessing body weight. Neither is perfect, but they each offer an assessment that tells whether you need to take steps to control your weight and, consequently, lower your risk of cancer and other chronic diseases. Why not give one of them a try?

1. **Body Mass Index (BMI)** is one method used to indicate whether you are at a healthy weight or not. The BMI chart in this booklet shows the range, for most adults, of healthy and unhealthy weights for different heights. To use the chart, find your weight on the side and your height at the bottom. Then locate your BMI group.

Body Mass Index is a measurement of weight status recognised by the World Health Organisation.

Calculation of Body Mass Index (BMI)

$$\text{Weight}_{(kg)} \div \text{Height}_{(m)}^2 = \text{BMI}$$



2. A second, complementary means of assessing possible risk due to excess body fat is **measuring your waist**. Place a tape around your waist parallel to the floor, midway between lower rib margin and the iliac crest. Measure after exhaling with a relaxed abdomen. For women, a waist measurement of 31.5 inches (80 cm) or more indicates high risk. For men, the significant figure is 35.5 inches (90 cm) or more.

In most cases, the BMI and waist measurements will support each other. But some people with a BMI below 23, whose waist measurement indicates high risk, should consider themselves at high risk. If this applies to you, read the practical weight control tips listed in this booklet.

Practise Prevention

Even if both of your measurements show that you are in a healthy range, try not to become complacent. In today's society, bigger pack sizes and high fat foods continually tempt us. The easiest way to manage overweight is to never let it happen in the first place. So if you begin to see a steady increase in your weight, take action.

After reviewing the existing research on the subject, the Panel of the WCRF Expert Report concluded that from the perspective of cancer prevention, we should all avoid being overweight, and be as lean as possible without becoming underweight. What is more, we should limit the amount of weight we gain during adulthood to 11 pounds (5 kg) in order to reduce the risk of cancer.

Therefore, if your BMI or waist measurement indicates excess weight, it is time to take steps to reduce your risk of cancer and other chronic diseases. If you can, try to forget about any previous, unsuccessful attempts. Aim for a modest reduction. And remember, even the loss of a few pounds may reduce your risk of disease.



Weight control secrets

The best and surest way to lose weight is no mystery - consume fewer calories and exercise more. To reach this goal and reduce your cancer risk, WCRF HK and the Department of Health has developed an effective four-step approach to weight control. If you do not see your weight gradually decreasing, talk to your doctor or registered dietitian about a more individualised approach to weight management.



1 Limit food high in fat and sugar

A simple first step in controlling weight is to limit consumption of food and beverages high in sugar. Common food sources include sugary drinks, pure fruit juices, fast foods, snacks, desserts and confectionary. Moreover, try to base your meals on unrefined foods such as vegetables, fruits, wholegrains and choose lean cut of meat and low-fat dairy products.

2 Move towards a plant-based diet

By eating more of a variety of vegetables, whole grains (such as brown rice, noodles or wholemeal bread) and beans, you can cut down the amount of calories and fat you consume. A mostly plant-based diet also supplies an abundance of cancer-fighting substances, like vitamins, minerals, phytochemicals and dietary fibre.



3 Watch your portion sizes

Even for low fat and plant-based diet, excessive intake can add pounds if you eat more than you need. Eat only when you feel hungry, and serve yourself just as much as your body and activity level require. Try to stop eating as soon as you feel satisfied, but not until you are full up.

4 Keep physically active

Burning calories is an essential part of weight balance. Exercise may also reduce the urge to eat, since it helps relieve stress and improve your self-esteem. For your overall health and cancer risk reduction, adults are suggested to perform at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity (e.g. climbing stairs or brisk walking) for at least five days a week.





Be practical

Successful weight loss and management come from healthy habits, which take time to become part of your daily routine. Any attempt to lose weight should be carried out with caution to ensure that you have all the nutrients you need. Go slowly. Try to change one part of your diet each week. Similarly, start exercising for at least 10 minutes a day until you can easily do more. A healthy rate of weight loss should be 1 to 2 pounds per week (not exceeding 1 kilogram a week). Evidence suggests that even a five per cent weight reduction, if maintained over the longer-term, can help ward off future illness.

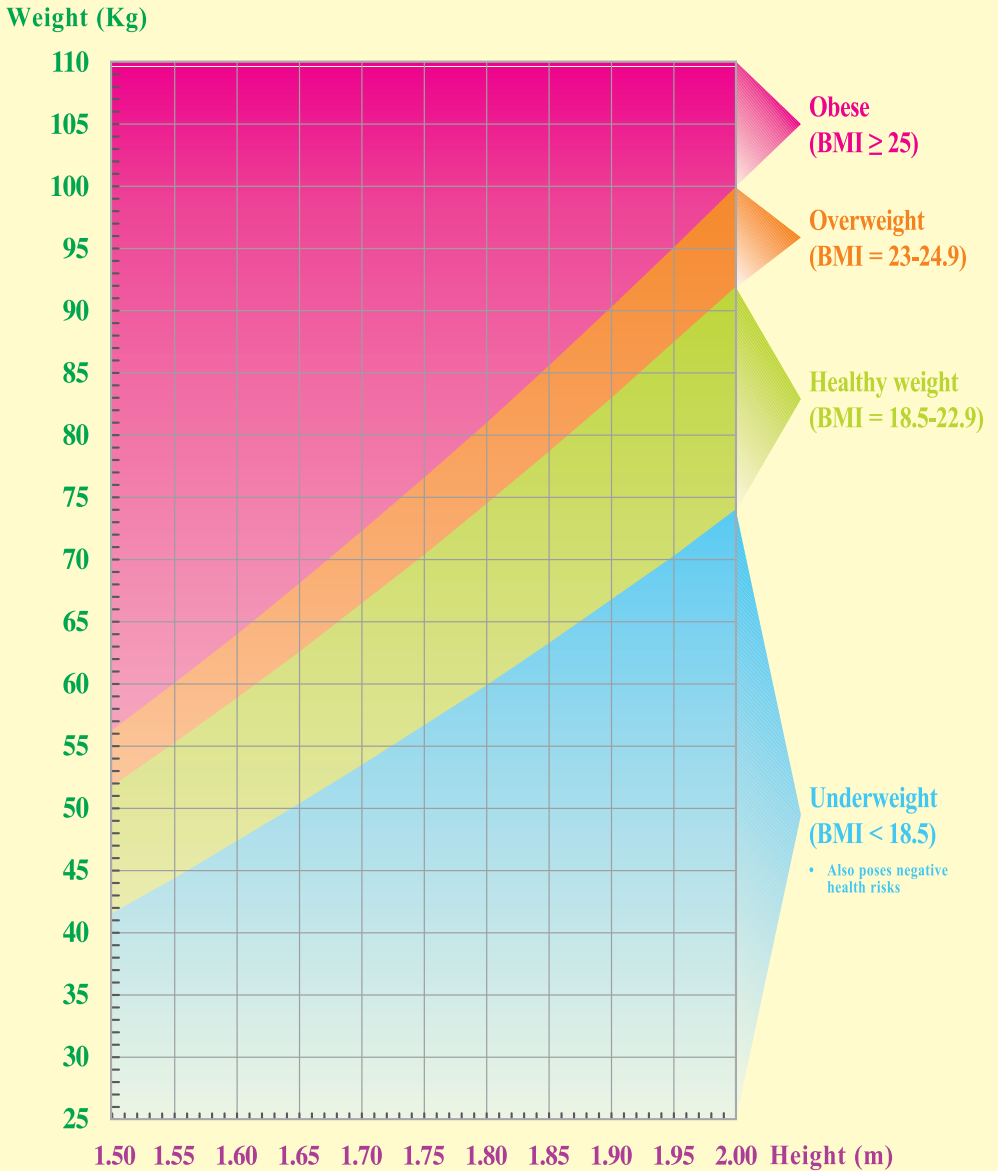
It is important to realize that being significantly underweight can present many health problems too. Don't go beyond what you need to manage your weight and try not to weigh yourself more than once a week. That's all you need to keep an eye on your weight changes.

A healthy life

If you are concerned about reducing your cancer risk and avoiding other chronic diseases associated with excess body fat, you should start paying attention to your weight. All adults who have a BMI above 23 are considered at risk of premature death and disability. By following recommendations made in this booklets and making them your daily habits, you should be able to reach and maintain a healthier weight. That implies reduced risk of chronic diseases, a greater sense of well-being as well as the pleasure that comes from regular exercise and healthy eating. Moreover, your good habits will make you a good model for children in your family and lead them to a healthy lifestyle as well.



BMI Chart (Asian reference)



Note: BMI may not be an accurate indicator for athletes, the elderly, pregnant women or adults less than five feet tall. The above cutoffs should not be used with growing children at all, whose BMI changes as they grow.

Reference: World Health Organization Western Pacific Region 2000



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WCRF HK's Recommendations for Cancer Prevention

- 1 Be as lean as possible without becoming underweight
- 2 Be physically active for at least 30 minutes every day
- 3 Avoid sugary drinks. Limit consumption of energy-dense foods (particularly processed foods high in added sugar, or low in fibre, or high in fat)
- 4 Eat more of a variety of vegetables, fruits, wholegrains, and pulses such as beans
- 5 Limit consumption of red meats (such as beef, pork and lamb) and avoid processed meat
- 6 If consumed at all, limit alcoholic drinks to 2 for men and 1 for women a day
- 7 Limit consumption of salty foods and foods processed with salt (sodium)
- 8 Don't use supplements to protect against cancer

Special Population Recommendations

- 9 It is best for mothers to breastfeed exclusively for up to 6 months and then add other liquids and foods
- 10 After treatment, cancer survivors should follow the Recommendations for Cancer Prevention

And, always remember - do not smoke or chew tobacco

WCRF HK is part of the WCRF global network

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