

Shed Those Pounds

Being obese increases the risk of developing heart disease or cancer.

Question: I am overweight, and I know that obesity increases the risk of heart disease and cancer. What can I do to fight back?

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Answer:When we develop bad habits related to our diet by eating the wrong foods, such as sugar (in excess), fast foods, fried foods, highly processed carbohydrates and meats (in excess), we become prone to obesity. You're right, being obese does increase the risk of developing either heart disease or cancer.

This correlation occurs because fat cells promote inflammation. It's an established medical fact that most heart disease and much cancer is actually caused by inflammation. Fat cells also play a beneficial role in the body—they produce substances that assist in regulating the immune system. But an excess of fat will easily outdo any healthful benefit it normally brings to the body. For example, too much fat in the body can:

1. trigger excessive inflammation, which eventually will lead to heart disease or cancer
2. cause the blood to clot, creating a predisposition to heart attack or stroke
3. constrict blood vessels, a reaction that eventually leads to hypertension
4. promote cell growth and blood vessel growth, which increases the risk of cancer.

By losing weight, especially fat around the middle, you will decrease inflammation and thus lower your risk of both heart disease and cancer. I recommend that you eliminate killer fats such as fried foods, especially those that are deep-fried. Don't buy a product if "hydrogenated" or "partially hydrogenated" fats are included.

Healthy fats should be consumed daily to ensure strong cell membranes and to continually repair other body components. Some of the healthiest fats are monounsaturated and are found in olives, almonds, avocados, olive oil and canola oil.

I believe the best fats are Omega-3 fatty acids. They are found primarily in cold-water fish such as salmon, mackerel, tuna, halibut, herring and cod. If you'd prefer, another option is to take at least one FDA-approved fish oil capsule, one to three times a day.

Another good source of healthy fat is flaxseed oil. I recommend at least one tablespoon once or twice a day. Since it has a short shelf life, it should be stored in the refrigerator and discarded if not used within 30 days. If you prefer, you may substitute the flaxseed oil with five to seven capsules, taken once or twice a day.

If you wish to improve your diet, you can begin by eating certain "power foods" that help prevent disease. These contain important "phytonutrients," or cancer-fighting chemicals. I recommend you include one or more of the following foods in your diet every day.

Vegetables in the cabbage family. These include broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, brussels sprouts, mustard greens,

radishes and turnips.

Soybeans and soybean products. I encourage you to try eating soy burgers, soy protein, soy milk and tofu.

Strawberries, tangerines and parsley. These contain invaluable and very powerful phytonutrients.

To ensure that your body receives the best nutritional value from them, it's best to eat the fruits and vegetables raw or juiced. The vegetables may be steamed or cooked in soups as well.

You can get started at losing some pounds by practicing the following weight-loss tips:

5. Take your body weight in pounds and divide it by two. Drink that number of ounces of filtered water each day.
6. Drink two 8-ounce glasses of water 30 minutes before each meal.
7. To burn more fat, drink two 8-ounce glasses of water, and then go for a brisk 20- to 40-minute walk first thing in the morning before eating.
8. If you stop losing weight, get a carbohydrate gram counter and decrease your carbohydrate intake to 20 grams a day for two weeks. Then gradually add more carbohydrates back into your diet.

A good rule to follow is to combine foods in a ratio of 40 percent carbohydrates, 30 percent proteins and 30 percent (good) fats.