

THE ROLE OF WEIGHT LOSS & BODY WEIGHT IN THE MANAGEMENT OF OSTEOARTHRITIS

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Having been recently diagnosed with hip osteoarthritis (OA), I can appreciate the chronic discomfort those with OA must live with each day. Although my running career has ended, I now seek alternative ways to relieve my arthritis pain, improve my physical function, and possibly SLOW down the progression of OA disease. Recently, my doctor told me I should continue with moderate exercise, but choose non-weight bearing activities such as swimming and biking, together with a good stretching program. My doctor also emphasized the importance of maintaining a **HEALTHY BODY WEIGHT**. For the remainder of this article I will review the effects of body weight on OA, and identify strategies to help you reach a healthy body weight.

Joint Pain is Strongly Associated with Body Weight

Did you know that being only 10 pounds overweight increases the force on the knee by 30-60 pounds with each step? Research suggests that being overweight may accelerate the breakdown of cartilage. Reports from an 18 month study conducted at Wake Forest University in 2004 showed that weight loss combined with moderate exercise decreased baseline pain by 30%, while average weight loss was 6% of starting weight (Arthritis & Rheumatism, 2004, vol 50). Weight loss (as little as 6-10%) can be an effective modifiable factor in the treatment of OA.

Striving for a Healthy Body Weight

How can one determine if their weight falls within a healthy weight range? Throughout the world, **Body Mass Index (BMI)** has been adopted

by most health professionals to determine if an individual's weight is in the low, moderate, or high risk zone for developing health problems such as OA. One of the benefits of using the BMI is that it considers a wider range of acceptable shapes and sizes (i.e. small, tall, well-built, slight) compared to previous standards such as height and weight tables. However, BMI should not be used for everyone including: children under 20 years, seniors, pregnant women, and muscular individuals such as athletes. Difference in body composition is the reason why the BMI tool is not used for these individuals.

The BMI range is based on a formula that compares height in metres with weight in kilograms. The formula is the same for men and women. **Turn over page to calculate your BMI.** Overweight is considered a BMI of 25-29.9, whereas Obese is a BMI of >30. Is your BMI putting you at risk for developing OA or exacerbating OA? Successful strategies for reaching a healthy weight include reducing your food intake, increasing your physical activity, and challenging past behaviours associated with over eating and/or eating the wrong foods.

Strategies for Successful Weight Loss

- Establish an initial weight loss goal of no more than 10% of your weight. Moderate weight loss of ½ -1 pound /week will allow your body to gradually adjust to your changing weight, while enabling you to eat a variety of foods as outlined in Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating.
- Establish Action Steps to help you reach your goal

- Less is Best! Are you suffering from portion distortion? Consult with your local dietitian and learn more about portion sizes and recommended servings for weight loss.
- Set yourself up to succeed! Identify food/beverages, people, and/or situations that elicit an urge to overeat. Avoid these food cues at all costs. (i.e. don't buy tempting food, take a different route home to avoid fast food alley, avoid negative people, etc.)
- Eat 6 small meals each day. This will help you shrink your stomach that may have been stretched from eating large portions of food.
- Eat to live vs. Live to eat! Enjoy all food, including occasional treats – MODERATION is the key. I often recommend one "treat" of 250kcal/week to clients on a weight loss program.
- Regular, moderate exercise is essential for successful weight loss. Aim for 30-60 minutes 5-7 days/week. Check with your doctor to find out what exercises would be best for your OA.

Why weight? Engage in a weight loss and exercise program NOW that will help you manage your OA. Contact your local dietitian to find out more about weight loss programs & services in your community.

Leslie Carson, RD, MBA, is a registered dietitian and sports nutritionist. As a member of Canada's National Marathon team (2001), Leslie knows and understands the physical, mental and nutrition demands of high performing athletes.



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