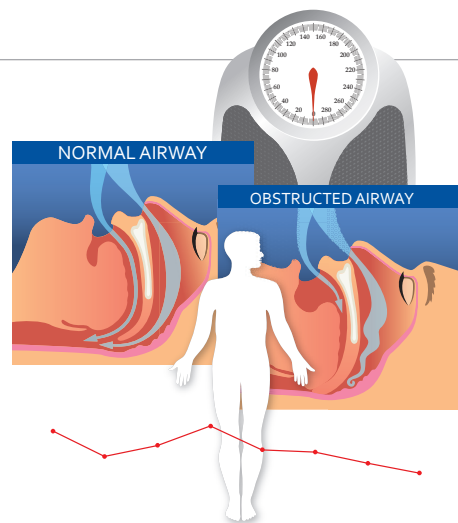


## Weight Loss and Sleep Apnea

Obstructive sleep apnea (OSA) is a common problem that affects a person's breathing during sleep. A person with OSA has times when air flow to the lungs is blocked due to the collapse of the soft tissues in the air passages during sleep. Treatment of OSA depends on what is causing it. If you have problems with OSA from being obese or overweight, weight loss can be an option to help manage your OSA. Losing as little as 5-10% of your body weight can improve or resolve OSA. This fact sheet discusses how managing your weight could help treat OSA. (For more information about OSA and other treatments go to the ATS Patient Information Series at [www.thoracic.org/patients](http://www.thoracic.org/patients).)



### What type of program can help me lose weight?

Research shows that people lose the most weight if they take part in a complete lifestyle intervention program that has all of the following: 1) a restricted calorie diet, 2) increased physical activity and 3) behavioral therapy. Behavioral therapy involves working with a weight loss specialist to learn how to track your calories, activity levels and weight, as well as identifying your specific weight loss challenges and strategies to overcome them.

A number of effective (hospital or clinic-based) commercial weight loss and behavioral therapy programs are available. A weight loss program that offers you frequent visits with a weight loss specialist (such as a counselor) and provides long-term follow-up is associated with the greatest success. To further increase your chances of success, choose a program that best matches your preferences and lifestyle. For example, some people may prefer a "self-directed" weight loss program or an online program that includes the three components noted above.

Talk to your healthcare provider before you plan to start any weight loss program. This is especially true if you have a chronic disease, such as diabetes mellitus, heart disease, or are considering a very aggressive or extreme weight loss program.

### What type of diet should I follow to lose weight?

Decreasing your calorie intake while maintaining a nutritious, well-balanced diet can help you lose weight. In general, total calorie intake should be limited to 1200-1500 kcal per day for women and 1500-1800 kcal per day for men. You will need to continue for at least 6 months in order to lose weight safely. Choose the type of diet plan that you think you would be most likely to follow. Studies show that weight loss occurs because

of the calorie restriction, not because of the particular type of diet or program offered. Your weight loss specialist can teach you how to count and track your calorie intake. There are also computer programs and cell phone apps that you can use.

Tracking your food intake (food diary) for 2 weeks can give you clues as to changes you may need to make. Your food diary should include all meals, snacks and beverages that you eat/drink, as well as the type of food, total calories for each, time you ate, and why you ate.

Review your food diary with a dietician or other weight loss specialist to get advice for how best to change your diet.

Common diet goals:

- Set a healthy weight loss goal of 1-2 pounds per week.
- Eat least three meals per day. Eating frequent smaller meals has not been proven to cause more rapid weight loss. Do not skip meals.

Common dietary mistakes include:

- skipping meals
- underestimating your daily calorie intake
- eating a lot of refined, processed, and/or sugary foods
- not eating enough fresh fruits, vegetables, protein and/or fiber
- not drinking enough water to stay well hydrated
- drinking alcohol, fruit juices or sugary soda
- frequent snacking between meals
- adding high calorie condiments, dressings, and/or sauces to your food

General strategies to promote healthy eating:

- Control your portions. Portion control is an important factor in controlling your calories. Read food labels to better understand portion sizes and calories. Some people also find eating from smaller plates or bowls to be helpful.
- Plan ahead. Cooking your own meals allows you to control the number of ingredients and avoid hidden calories. Plan snacks ahead of time so you will not be caught hungry without a healthy option.
- Drink water to keep hydrated. Limit caloric beverages, such as juices, sodas, shakes, and alcohol.
- Avoid late evening meals. Eating late at night may contribute to weight gain, possibly due to the body's lower metabolic rate at night.
- Avoid distractions, such as watching TV, during meals. This can lead to overeating.
- Choose meals that are high in fiber, complex carbohydrates, and are low in sugar. Complex carbohydrates such as brown rice, quinoa, whole grains, sweet potatoes, and oatmeal are healthier options than processed, simple carbohydrates such as white bread, cereals, crackers, white potatoes, and white rice.
- Strive to make every meal and snack well balanced, with protein, fat, and carbohydrates.
- Limit high fat foods. Choose grilled or baked foods over fried foods, "clear", low calorie dressings (vinaigrette) over creamy, high calorie dressings (ranch) and clear broth-based soups instead of creamy thick soups.

Address any special dietary concerns due to diabetes, high blood pressure, food allergies, etc. as part of your overall healthy eating plan.

After you lose the weight, you will want to follow up with a program to maintain your new healthier state and have a repeat sleep study to see how much improvement you have in your OSA.

### Physical Activity and Exercise

Increasing your levels of everyday physical activity and exercise are positive goals for everyone. Exercise can help you maintain a healthy weight and benefit your health in many other ways. However, exercise must be combined with a healthy diet to achieve weight loss. Studies have shown that in people with OSA, exercise alone results in little to no improvement in weight or OSA severity.

Here are some ways to increase your day-to-day activity:

- take the stairs instead of the elevator
- park at the end of parking lots to encourage more walking
- carry your grocery bags
- take breaks from sitting at your desk and stand or walk throughout the day
- get an exercise buddy! You can keep each other going and enjoy the time together.

Ask your healthcare provider about exercises that are safe for you. Walking is generally a safe and effective exercise for most people. Walking 30 minutes a day, 5 days a week can improve

high blood pressure, help reduce stress, and possibly improve sleep quality.

### Additional weight loss measures

For some people who are very overweight, a healthcare provider may recommend adding a weight loss medication and/or weight loss surgery. These may be considered for a person who has failed to lose weight despite carefully following a good weight loss program.

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## Rx Action Steps

Adopt and stick to a healthy diet and regular exercise to lose excess weight and improve your health and OSA.

- ✓ Ask your healthcare provider how you can get started.
- ✓ Select a weight loss program that includes a weight loss specialist or counselor who can offer advice and support with frequent meetings over time.
- ✓ Increase your levels of physical activity and exercise.
- ✓ Maintain a positive attitude. You have the power to eat healthfully, lose weight, and feel better. Change is possible!
- ✓ Work with your healthcare provider to treat OSA and decide when to repeat a sleep study when you lose weight.

**Healthcare Provider's Contact Number:**

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## Online Resources for Weight Loss

### American Thoracic Society

- <https://www.thoracic.org/patients>
- <https://www.thoracic.org/statements/resources/sleep-medicine/weight-mgmt-in-osa-treatment-exec-summ.pdf>

### National Heart, Lung, and Brain Institute

- <https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov>

### American Heart Association

- <https://www.heart.org>

### Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics

- [www.eatright.org](http://www.eatright.org)

### American Diabetes Association

- [www.diabetes.org](http://www.diabetes.org)

### American Society for Metabolic and Bariatric Weight Loss

- <https://asmbs.org/>

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