Achieving & Maintaining a Healthy Weight - Factsheet

General Guidelines

The key to achieving and maintaining a healthy body weight is having a good nutritious diet, practicing portion control with your food, and undertaking regular physical activity.

When you eat you consume energy in the form of kilojoules (kJ) from your food. Your body then uses or expends energy/kJ when it metabolises food, maintains normal bodily functions and when you undertake physical activities. So, on one side of the weight management equation there is “energy in” and on the other side there is “energy out”.

To maintain your weight at a particular level, “energy in” needs to equal “energy out”. To lose weight you need to either consume less energy than you use or use more energy than you consume. And to increase weight – which happens easily if you don’t pay attention to food consumption and energy use – you need to either consume more energy than you use or use less energy than you consume.

Food Composition

Different components of food are made up of different amounts of energy. The major components of food are carbohydrate, fat and protein, and the energy value per gram of carbohydrate, fat and protein is:

- **Carbohydrates** – 16kJ
- **Protein** – 17kJ
- **Fat** – 37 kJ

Different foods have different proportions of these components and how much energy different foods have depends on the amount and mix of carbohydrate, protein and fat in the food. For example, foods with a high proportion of carbohydrate will have fewer kilojoules or be of lower energy density than foods with a high proportion of fat.
If weight loss or maintaining a healthy body weight is your goal, foods that are high in kilojoules or high in energy density should be consumed sparingly or in moderation.

**Alcohol**

Alcohol also contains a lot of kilojoules, and for both health reasons and to prevent weight gain, it should be consumed in moderation. Every gram of alcohol contains 29kJ. A medium sized glass of wine contains approximately 447kJ.

**Portion Control**

As well as choosing foods that are low (or moderate) in kilojoules or energy density, you can also regulate your “energy in” by being careful with the size of your servings – i.e., portion control.

Research suggests that you are more likely to achieve and then maintain a healthy weight, if you choose foods that are low/moderate in kilojoules at the same time as having conservative sized servings.

For an idea of recommended serving sizes and how many you should have of particular foods each day visit [www.tinyurl.com/portioncontrol](http://www.tinyurl.com/portioncontrol).

Another way to think of serving sizes, particularly if you don’t have measuring spoons, cups etc within easy reach is to visualise them. For example a serving of fruit could be a medium sized apple which is about the size of a tennis ball. And a serving of tasty cheese is one slice or 20g which is about the size of a playing card.

**Physical Activity**

The “energy out” side of the equation is just as important as the “energy in” aspect.

All forms of physical activity use up energy and so the amount of physical activity you do has a great impact on how much of the energy from your food is used and whether or not as a result you gain, lose or maintain weight. If you are not active enough to balance the amount of energy you consume, the excess energy is stored as fat and you can gain weight.