

Resolve to find your 'healthy weight' next week

**“Moving Grays Harbor”
By Maryann Welch**

Did your scale inch up a little over the last couple of months? Are your clothes feeling a little tighter? Research tells us that weight gain is a gradual occurrence. We slowly put on weight and accept the few pounds here and there until we are very conscious of the fact that we are overweight. Some 65 percent – nearly two-thirds – of our Grays Harbor population is overweight or clinically obese. This doesn't just happen overnight – it's a gradual accumulation for each person that results in this grim statistic.

So, one day the clothes don't fit or we can't perform normal activities as we'd like and we begin to look for quick fixes. There are plenty of diets that promise “quick and amazing” results. However, we discover that they are only “amazing” when you can actually stick with “the program”...and many of those “programs” are unhealthy to maintain over a long period of time. Our Health Officer, Dr. John Bausher claims that “patients who have been successful in losing weight and keeping it off find that there's really no magic – it's a balanced and healthy diet and exercise.”

Enter “Healthy Weight Week”. Healthy Weight Week is an annual, national observance that focuses attention on the importance of staying at a healthy weight. According to the National Institute of Diabetes, Digestive and Kidney Diseases, only 33.5% of

Americans are at a healthy weight. Diseases related to obesity are on the increase as well and there seems to be no simple solution. In Grays Harbor the incidence of diabetes-related death and disease is significantly higher here than the state average. We all know the facts. Healthy Weight Week gives us a chance to reflect on the effect weight may be having in each of our lives.

So, what exactly is a “healthy weight”? The answer to that is different for everyone. Sure, there are scales, charts and formulas to help you figure out where you are in comparison to what is considered “normal”. These are all good tools, but truly everyone has a different healthy weight and that weight might not fit into the “normal” range. This is something that should be discussed with your doctor.

Personally, I try to maintain a weight that allows me to easily practice physical activities that I enjoy and that will assure my mobility is not impaired by my weight. Achieving and keeping at a healthy weight includes lifestyle, eating habits, good nutrition and exercise. What we choose to eat directly affects our body's well-being and our personal quality of life. The Healthy Weight Network encourages the eating of regular meals and nutritious snacks along with choosing a variety of foods.

Now that I've covered the *what* and the *why*...let's address the *how*. I know many of you have tried diets in the past and have had some degree of success. Usually that success lasts until you go back to your normal eating habits. Research shows that in order for weight loss to be maintained over a period of time, it has to come off slowly. The usual recommendation is 1-2 pounds per week. The best way to accomplish this is to make gradual, healthy changes in your diet and to

increase your activity during the day. Dr. Bausher notes, “many of my patients that are at an unhealthy weight underestimate how much they eat and over-estimate how physically active they are. In this case I ask my patients to keep a diary for a week to document food intake and energy output.” Write down everything you eat or drink during those days, and even some notes about time of day, your mood, etc. Add in any information about your level of physical activity. This will help you to pick out problem areas in your diet in order to come up with some successful strategies to deal with them. Take a look at what you have written down then try to identify 1-2 changes that you could make in your routine to add increased nutrition with fewer calories and expend more energy. It’s that simple. You don’t have to overhaul your whole diet all at once. Make a few positive changes every week and they will begin to add up. You will soon see that making a permanent change in your eating habits is not such an overwhelming task.

For many the issue is getting to a healthy weight and for others it’s maintaining that weight. A couple of years ago I made a big push to lose 12 pounds. I’m happy to report that I was successful with the help of a daily diary and increased activity. I have since found that it is equally challenging to maintain the weight at which I feel good. In the fall, I noticed that my clothing felt a little tight and the scales had crept up a few pounds. When I kept a diary as Dr. Bausher advised above, I found that I had allowed myself to do more “mindless” eating and I wasn’t paying attention to portion control. A couple of weeks of measuring food and writing down my eating helped me to get back to the weight at which I’m comfortable. I now try to practice “mindful” eating – being aware of what, when and where I’m eating as well as making a conscious choice of each food.

Finally, don’t let the media entice you with those claims of “an amazing body in just 30 days”. The old adage is always true in this case; “if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is”. Work with what you have, set realistic goals and celebrate each milestone. Healthy weight can be your reality with adopting a few simple healthy habits.

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If you have questions about becoming more active or have information about free or low-cost activity in the area, contact the public health department at 532-8665 ext. 483, e-mail us at moving@co.grays-harbor.wa.us or visit our web site at www.ghphss.org.