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Registered Dietitians Share Their Top 10 Secrets for Losing Weight After 60
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As the number of candles on your birthday increases, you may notice your weight increasing right along with it.

If that sounds familiar, trust us—it's very normal. "Studies show that women gain on average 1.5 pounds per year after the age of 50," says Julia Zumpano RDN, LD of Cleveland Clinic's Center for Human Nutrition. Zumpano also points to a 2022 study of more than 13,800 adults that showed people saw the number on the scale go up by an average of 6.6% over 10 years. If you recently (or not-so-recently) hit the big 6-0, you might be wondering what goes into losing weight after 60.

The definition of "healthy weight" for people ages 60 and up can get murky. Doctors often use Body Mass Index (BMI), which defines overweight as having a BMI of 25.0 to 29.9 and obese as 30.0 or higher. However, this number is hardly one-size-fits-all, and race and gender differences in body composition have made BMI a controversial measurement.

Weight isn't the be-all-end-all of a person's identity—and shouldn't be. Still, experts share that it is one clue into a person's overall health, and something to watch, especially as you age. "In addition to health concerns, weight gain can negatively impact your quality of life, especially with age, leading to mobility issues and depression as individuals grapple with the health challenges that accompany a high BMI and insufficient physical activity," says Kelsey Costa, MS, RDN, a Nutrition Consultant for Diabetes Strong, Inc.

Moreover, it might be helpful to understand why weight gain becomes more common as you age

(and loss becomes more challenging). Registered dietitians shared insights and tips for weight loss after 60.

What's Happening to the Body in Your 60s (And How It Affects Weight)

1. Fat increases

Zumpano notes that extra pounds can be attributed to body fat naturally increasing over time, explaining, "Your body fat goes up in your 50s and can continue to increase in your 60s."

Visceral fat is of particular concern. "Visceral fat is the fat around your abdominal area and each one of your organs," says Kim Shapira, MS, RD, registered dietitian and Trimly Nutritional Coach. "The more visceral fat we have, the higher our risk of metabolic syndrome and other weight-related diseases. This fat makes it hard for insulin to help get sugar into the cells."

Visceral fat can contribute to diabetes, heart disease and stroke, says Courtney Pelitera, MS, RD, CNSC, a certified registered dietitian at Top Nutrition Coaching.

Unfortunately, visceral fat is a product of aging too. "As we age, fat stores tend to move from the abdominal area under the skin—subcutaneous fat—into the deeper areas of tissue, where they become visceral fat," Pelitera explains.

2. Muscle mass decreases

As people get older, their ability to maintain muscle mass decreases, which can actually contribute to an uptick in weight.

"Muscle burns more calories than fat and, therefore, increases your metabolic rate," Zumpano says.

3. Menopause

Increases in fat and decreases in muscle mass can sometimes be due to biologically normal hormonal shifts. "There are also hormone changes that occur, particularly in women, during menopause and perimenopause, which can be about one-third of a woman's life," Shapira says. "Changes in hormones, such as estrogen, can lead to increased abdominal fat deposition and decreased muscle mass, making weight management more difficult."

4. Sedentary lifestyle

Less movement can also lead to more weight, especially without dietary tweaks. "Energy expenditure goes down, but dietary intake may stay the same or increase," Zumpano says.

While sedentary lifestyles may be written off as "something for lazy people," Shapira thinks that's unfair.

"As we age, we might have more physical ailments or joint pain, making it harder to move our bodies, which then slows our metabolism and can cause weight gain," Shapira explains.

Weight, Cancer and Longevity

Heart disease and diabetes are frequently mentioned diseases linked, in part, to obesity. (Other factors like genetics also come into play.) However, Costa points out that weight gain is also linked with cancer risk.

Indeed, the CDC reports that being overweight or obese is associated with increased odds of developing 13 types of cancer, which comprise nearly half (40%) of the cancers diagnosed in the U.S. annually.

What gives? The CDC points to weight-related body changes that can contribute to the development of chronic inflammation and higher insulin and sex hormones. The more excess weight a person has—and the longer they remain overweight—the higher the cancer risk.

Research from 2022 found that older people whose weight fluctuates were at an increased risk for all-cause mortality than their peers whose weight remained stable.

Weight and Mental Health

Weight is an emotional topic. Many of us grew up being sent messages that beauty meant fitting into a specific jean size, and it wasn't cool. These messages stick with us and even continue into adulthood. It can make the normal body changes that may result in a higher weight emotionally taxing as we age. One dietitian encourages people to be gentle with themselves. Mindset shifts can help.

"As we age, it's important to think about reaching your best weight versus your lowest weight," says Jamie Nadeau, RD, a registered dietitian.

For instance, Nadeau stresses that losing weight due to a decrease in muscle isn't ideal and may trigger weight gain. Think about healthy habits like enjoyable movements that make you feel good and help you reach goals that have nothing to do with a scale.

"It's incredibly important as we age to maintain good habits and physical activity so that we can preserve our physical function, stay healthy and maintain the best quality of life possible," Nadeau explains.

10 Tips for Weight Loss After 60

If you're trying to lose weight after 60, here's what nutritionists recommend.

1. Eat when you're hungry

Fad diets are not on the menu, nor is starving yourself.

"Start with your normal portion and cut it in half," Shapira says. "Then, wait 15 minutes to see if you need more food. This is the failsafe that you will not be overeating because the other half is right there if you need it. Hopefully—and ideally—you'll be hungry 2.5 to three hours later."

2. Consume protein-rich foods

Protein is like a Swiss Army knife on a plate. "We lose protein as we age, and high protein intake can help maintain and increase muscle mass," Zumpano says.

And that's huge. As Pelitera explains, "Preserving muscle mass will help to maintain a healthy metabolism but also will help with being able to manage all activities of daily function for as long as possible throughout the aging process."

What are good protein sources? Costa suggests starting with plant-based options like beans.

"Although consuming protein in any form is associated with healthy aging, new research suggests that consuming a diet rich in plant-based protein is the most effective way to promote healthy aging and maintain positive health status, particularly for women," Costa says, pointing to a 2024-published study of more than 48,000 people.

3. Eat the rainbow

A colorful plate isn't just for aesthetics—it means you're probably eating a meal loaded with produce.

"Fruits and vegetables, especially vegetables, are low in calories and high in fiber. Including more fiber and volume on your plate through fruits and vegetables helps you to eat a less calorically dense meal while also keeping you fuller and more satisfied," Nadeau says. "Plus, fruits and veggies are packed with tons of health-promoting nutrients, so it's a good idea to get more of them anyway."

4. Decrease sugar, ultra-processed foods and alcohol

Listen, no one is saying you can't consume sweet treats or have an occasional glass of vino. However, moderation is key.

"Alcohol and foods high in sugar such as sweets, desserts and baked goods can lead to excess calories and provide very little if any nutritional value," Zumpano warns.

Pelitera agrees, explaining, "Foods that are higher in saturated fats, fried foods, high sugar foods and low-nutrient foods should be eaten very sparingly. These foods are high in calories and easy to over-consume, causing increased fat storage."

5. Eat mindfully

Mindfulness is buzzy, and it extends to eating.

"Work on slowing down and taking a pause before making food choices so that you can minimize impulsive eating," Nadeau suggests. "Try asking yourself questions like: 'Do I want this? Do I need this, or do I need something else? Can I add a nutritious food to this?'"

Shapira adds that eating distraction-free (read: Without checking email or your missed call log) can help you tune into your body's cues.

6. Say goodnight...to the kitchen

Zumpano says it's best to close the kitchen after dinner, sharing, "Most often, snacking after dinner is habitual and not generated by actual hunger. Food choices tend to be high calorie and carb-rich, which often leads to excess caloric intake."

7. Sleep

One way to reduce your odds of a midnight snack? Ensuring you're asleep (and still sleeping) well before the clock strikes 12.

"Studies have shown that if you consistently sleep less than seven hours a night, your hunger hormone, ghrelin, can be activated, leading to increased appetite and intake," Zumpano explains.

8. Manage stress

Life happens, and it's stressful. However, developing healthy coping mechanisms can be beneficial physically and mentally.

"Manage your stress levels by making sure you're engaging in self-care activities regularly...and prioritizing things that you enjoy," Nadeau says. "Stress can also impact your weight, food choices and physical activity negatively."

9. Get moving

The American Heart Association recommends getting 150 minutes of moderate-intensity or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity exercise each week. "Exercise helps burn calories and build muscle mass," Zumpano says. "Choose a combination of cardio and resistance exercises."

Not sure where to start? Resources may be available at your fingertips. "There are many simple exercise routines that can be found on websites such as YouTube or are offered for free at your local gym," Pelitera explains.

10. Work with a dietitian

Aging, weight loss and life in general can feel lonely. However, support is available if you're trying to lose weight.

"A registered dietitian is a healthcare professional who specializes in food and nutrition," Pelitera shares. "Dietitians can help build a healthy meal plan that fits into your lifestyle and utilizes foods that you enjoy eating regularly."

Your primary care doctor may be able to refer you to a registered dietitian and some of them are covered by insurance.

Source

- Kim Shapira MS, RD, registered dietitian and Trimly Nutritional Coach

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