



help yourself to lose weight



Scotland needs to get its weight down – and the sooner the better!

If you've been advised to look at ways of losing weight then this leaflet will help you.

The links between excess weight and levels of activity are clear: become more active and you automatically work on your weight at the same time – with important benefits to your health.

We'll show you here exactly how it all works, and precisely what you need to do to achieve measurable health benefits.

Active lives: it's all about balance

In Scotland, 61% of Scottish men and 52% of Scottish women are overweight or obese. Weight also tends to increase with age. In the age group 55 to 64, the figure rises to 76% of men and 72% of women.

That means the energy they're taking in, in the form of food eaten, is more than the energy they're 'burning off' in terms of physical activity. Of course, your body 'burns' energy just ticking over. But the more active you are, the more energy you 'burn off'.

Getting the balance right means getting your weight right.

- If your food intake is less than the energy you use, you'll lose weight.
- If your food intake is equal to the energy you use, you'll stay the same.
- If the food you take in is more than the energy you use, you'll gain weight.

So while eating less is a factor in weight loss, it's just part of the story. Using up calories by being more active will either help you maintain your present weight and not get any heavier or actually lead to weight loss.

Before we consider the ways we can be more active, we need to stress the importance of eating a healthy diet.

A healthy diet...

Is one that you should **enjoy** – it doesn't need to be anything special, odd or unfamiliar. It certainly need not be 'slimming' foods.

Should be **lower in fats** – especially saturated fats like full fat dairy products and things like chips and crisps.

Should be **higher in fruit and vegetables** – you can eat large amounts without worrying about their effect on weight.

Should be **higher in fibre** – for example, 'wholegrain' versions of bread, pasta and rice.

Should be **lower in alcohol** – for example, drink half pints rather than pints or make longer drinks with low calorie or calorie-free mixers.

Should be **balanced** – containing plenty of fruit and vegetables and starchy foods such as bread, rice and pasta, smaller amounts of protein-rich foods (meat, fish, chicken, pulses, etc.) and lower fat dairy products, and with only occasional small amounts of fatty, sugary foods such as crisps, cakes, pastries, sweets and fizzy drinks.

achieving healthier eating

- Think about the role that food plays in your life and be conscious of why you are eating at particular times.
- Keep a diary of your eating habits and look back at what you eat and when.
- Avoid snacking on fatty or sugary foods between meals.
- Think of alternatives you **could have chosen** – could you replace a chocolate biscuit with a piece of fruit?
- Read food labels and check the ingredients.



More information on healthy eating

You can get more information and lots of good ideas about improving your diet from many sources:

- Health Scotland's booklet *The Little Book of White Lies*, available from your local health promotion department
- <http://www.healthyliving.gov.uk>. Scottish site for general information on healthy eating and physical activity. Call the healthy living advice line on **0845 2 78 88 78**
- <http://www.healthscotland.com>. Scottish site for general and specialist health education information
- <http://www.bbc.co.uk/food/healthyeating>. UK site with information on principles of healthy eating and the main food groups
- <http://www.food.gov.uk/healthiereating>. UK site from the Food Standards Agency with general information on healthy eating and various initiatives.

A healthier diet goes hand in hand with physical activity. And once you've achieved your weight loss, an active life helps you maintain a healthy weight.



Get the facts: how much and how often?

This is what everyone needs to know: 'Adults should accumulate (build up) at least 30 minutes of moderate activity on most days of the week.' Physical Activity Task Force, 2003.

This will help maintain your weight, and help prevent you gaining more weight. For **weight loss**, you need to aim for **more** ... think of it as 30 minutes as a starting point, and then if possible gradually increase the time you spend being active or the intensity of the activity.

'Moderate activity' means something like brisk walking. There's no need to sweat, be out of breath or be exhausted. Try the 'talk test' – keeping up a conversation while you're in action.

Those 30 minutes don't have to be done all at once. Two brisk walks to and from work, or the bus stop at the beginning and end of each day might add up to half an hour. A kick-about with a ball in the park with your children might give you 10 minutes' activity, or you might get a further 30 minutes if you go swimming.

Other health benefits associated with maintaining a healthy weight and an active life include a lower risk of:

- coronary heart disease
- stroke
- diabetes
- raised blood pressure
- gall bladder disease
- arthritis
- back pain
- varicose veins
- some cancers.

Don't stop there!
You can get additional health benefits by:

- being active for more than 30 minutes
- being active every day, and not just on 'most' days
- increasing the intensity of your activity – such as walking or swimming faster.

Action stations: ideas to try

Being active doesn't have to mean gyms, team sports or expensive classes. You can do things that are free, that don't need any special organisation and that allow you to wear ordinary clothes.

Your family doctor or practice nurse can also help you with weight loss and give you some suggestions for physical activity. Ask if your doctor is part of the exercise referral scheme – if so, he or she can refer you for a specialist consultation at a local leisure centre.

walking back to happiness

Brisk walking is best – walk as if you are late for an appointment. You need to:

- feel slightly warmer
- breathe a little faster
- feel your heart beating a little faster.

A short and gentle stroll is pleasant, but you need to aim for more, in order to have an impact on your health. Build up your walking, and try to become more active each day.

'I decided to walk to work twice a week at first, instead of using the bus. It took me twenty-five minutes the first week, and the next week I tried to walk a bit quicker – and it took me five minutes less. As I lost more weight, I found it a lot easier and more enjoyable, and I started to do it more often. Sometimes I even manage a brisk walk at lunchtime too – even if it's just fifteen minutes – it all adds up.'

Hannah, 53.

Hint: explore local walks in your area – there could be a number you don't know about. Check out Paths to Health for local walking projects in your area (<http://www.pathsforall.org.uk>; tel 01259 218855).

in the swim

Most swimming pools have adult classes if you need to learn or to improve in order to enjoy swimming. Find out class details by calling locally, or at Scottish Swimming <http://www.scottishswimming.com>.

'My son loves to race up and down the pool – I used to bob up and down at the edge and watch him but now I actually swim with him. Before I was just kidding myself about going for a swim, now I'm increasing my levels of activity, getting faster, as well as losing weight! It makes you feel better as well as giving you a sense of achievement that you can really do it.' Ian, 40.

Hint: if your child is taking part in classes, use that time for a swim on your own. Track your speed and aim to improve over time.

cycle-logical!

Cycle to work or to the shops, or choose trail or mountain biking to explore the countryside, away from traffic dangers. For information, go to <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/recreation>.

Remember to wear a well-fitted cycle helmet.

Cycling Scotland can give you more ideas, and put you in touch with contacts in your area. Local cycle campaigns can be useful. Go to <http://www.cyclingscotland.org> for links and contact numbers.

Hint: build up from short journeys to longer ones – and try hills once you start making more progress.

get on down and dance!

Boogie-ing to the latest chart hits is something you can do at home. If you have children or grandchildren, do it together! Or take a dance class in ballroom, jive or salsa, or Scottish country dancing. Look in the local *Yellow Pages* for information.

'I last danced as a teenager, but I started going to jive classes with my partner and found I could still do it – it's an incentive to lose weight, as I want to look good on the dance floor, too!' Bill, 52.

Hint: don't be shy or embarrassed. Dancing's brilliant for getting your body really working, but you need to do more than bob about ... start moving!

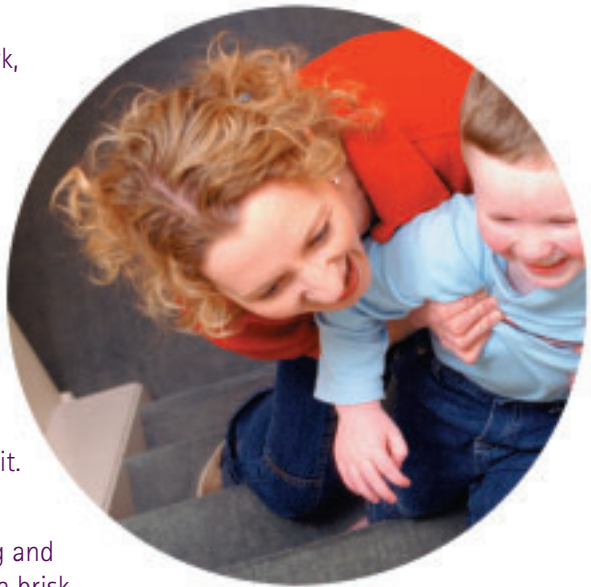


Break through the barrier: making time for activities

Lots of us are busy with work, family and just the routine tasks of shopping, cooking, washing, ironing ... the list's a long one. But making time to care for your well-being needs to get a look-in somewhere!

It may help to schedule regular times for your activities to get into the habit.

- Getting up early enough makes the most of spring and summer mornings – try a brisk walk with the dog or get the bike out.
- Early evening is a good time – go outside with a ball for a kick-about with your children.
- Weekends can be the best time for trying out new activities – plan ahead and find out from your partner or the rest of the family what they'd all like to try, and select each idea in turn.
- Fixing a regular time for a walk or a swim with a friend makes it more likely you'll keep the date.
- Don't make excuses! It doesn't cost anything – walking, jogging, playing actively with your children, are all free.
- Children shouldn't prevent you from being active – they can inspire you, and you can set a great example for them. See the leaflet *Get You and Your Family Moving* in this series.



'It worked for me!'

Sally from Helensburgh is 38. She has four children, and recently lost three stone in weight. She had begun to eat more healthily but it was the changes she made to her activity levels that made a real difference.

'The girls' night out with my friends is key – that's a regular seven mile walk when the dads get in from work, so they can babysit. I also did half an hour's aerobics before breakfast and as often I could, I left the car at home to do the school runs on foot – it's a mile round trip.'

Sally says she lost weight quite quickly at first on her healthier diet, but she introduced activity to ensure her weight loss continued, and now, to keep off what she's lost.

'I felt awful when I started the walking, but as time went on, I started to find it a lot easier, and now it's really enjoyable.'

Remember:

- try to gradually accumulate (build up) 30 minutes' moderate activity on most days of the week
- pick something you enjoy to ensure you keep it up
- stay in touch with your doctor if you're advised to.

Moving on: ideas, inspiration and information

<http://www.cyclingscotland.org>

<http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/recreation>

<http://www.healthyliving.gov.uk> or call the advice line on 0845 2 78 88 78

<http://www.pathsforall.org.uk>

<http://www.scottishswimming.com>

Other leaflets in the *Active Living* series:

- *Get You and Your Family Moving*
- *Help Yourself to Reduce the Risk of High Blood Pressure*
- *Keeping Active During and After Pregnancy*

To order, please call 0845 2 78 88 78, or visit www.healthyliving.gov.uk or contact your local health promotion department.

Translations and other formats of these materials are available. Please contact the healthyliving advice line on 0845 2 78 88 78.

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