

Loss & gains

Need motivation to lose weight? These important facts and figures may tip the scale in your favor.

BY Hope S. Warshaw, R.D., CDE



For people who carry extra pounds, weight loss promises a halo of health improvement. Trimming just 10–20 pounds can pay huge dividends in managing diabetes and other ailments—and save you money on health care expenses. Obesity causes a long list of problems—type 2 diabetes is only one of them. “Excess weight is at the root of more than 50 medical problems,” says Louis Aronne, M.D., clinical professor of medicine at Weill Cornell Medical College in New York City.

Fat in the fire

Central obesity—the accumulation of fat, or adipose tissue, around the abdomen and liver—is the master switch that sets off many obesity-related health problems, Aronne says. This fat buildup gives the body an apple-shape appearance.

Excess weight activates white blood cells that trigger inflammation throughout the body. Inflammation in turn causes fat cells to expand and put out larger-than-

normal amounts of some hormones, such as insulin. This overflow of insulin turns off the spigot of other hormones involved in blood glucose control. There’s also declining output of adiponectin, a hormone made in the adipose tissue that prevents type 2 diabetes and heart disease.

The changes that occur with inflammation and insulin resistance are at the core of the many weight-related problems. “These changes don’t show up overnight; they’re years in the making and surprisingly also include infertility, depression, and generally decreased energy,” says Ronald Tamler, M.D., Ph.D., assistant professor of endocrinology at Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York City.

Modest is mighty

When excess weight is lost, many conditions show improvement. “The benefits—from lower glucose to having healthier skin—seem endless,” says Beth DeLauder, 46, PWD type 2 from Stafford, Virginia.

Personal experience

There’s a bounty of benefits to weight loss, say Beth DeLauder and Ken Cole, PWDs type 2, such as these:

Increased energy. Ken appreciates having more energy. He recently participated in an American Diabetes Association Tour de Cure bicycle ride.

Better-quality sleep. Beth no longer lies in bed trying to fall asleep.

Money savings. Ken no longer spends \$8 daily on fast-food meals. And health care savings add up: fewer medicines, fewer provider visits, and fewer referrals to specialists.

Improved mental health. Beth says she feels better in every way, including mentally.

Get going

Ready to start losing weight now? Donna Ryan, M.D., professor at the Pennington Biomedical Research Center in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and past president of The Obesity Society, suggests these action steps:

1 Talk to your health care provider about whether losing a few pounds will improve your glucose control and offer other benefits.

2 Review your blood glucose-lowering medications with your provider: Are they foiling your efforts to lose pounds? Some newer medicines may aid weight loss.

3 Ask for a referral to a reliable and successful weight management program. Support and education are crucial for weight loss and maintenance.

"I didn't know I felt so bad. I was clueless about the many ways my extra baggage was impacting my health." Beth, who has shed 40 pounds, says she feels better in every way.

Weight loss need not be drastic. "Modest weight loss, 5–7 percent from starting weight, has what's called 'curious power' to lower glucose because it's powerful beyond what's expected," says Donna Ryan, M.D., professor at the Pennington Biomedical Research Center in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and past president of The Obesity Society.

Best time for weight loss

The sooner you trim down after learning you have type 2 diabetes, the better. You'll salvage more of your existing insulin-making beta cells. Losing weight can rack up even more health benefits for people who have prediabetes or risk factors for developing type 2 because they have less insulin resistance and more beta cells.

Weight loss soon after type 2 diagnosis may minimize the need for blood glucose-lowering medicines for a few years. "Out of the starting gate at 250 pounds, I was on Actos and metformin, as well as medicines to control my blood pressure and blood lipids," says Ken Cole, 37, PWD type 2 from Seabrook, Texas. Now at 180 pounds, Ken takes only metformin and a blood pressure medicine.

If you've lived with diabetes for a while and haven't lost weight, move forward now. Most people will experience at least a few benefits regardless of the number of pounds lost or how long they've had diabetes, Aronne says.

The biggest wins

"From the standpoint of glucose control, shedding a few pounds by reducing calories in and burning


more with exercise gives you the biggest bang for your efforts," Ryan says. Even people working to maintain their weight often experience continued improvement in glucose control, she says.

When it comes to lowering blood pressure and triglycerides and increasing HDL (good) cholesterol, modest weight loss provides a big assist, especially when achieved with regular physical activity. Shedding a few pounds can also improve depression, sleep apnea, and arthritis in the knees and hips.

Some conditions require greater weight loss to improve. Correcting LDL (bad) cholesterol requires shedding more pounds and typically a statin medication. "When it comes to the infertility issues in men and women, more than modest weight loss is needed—particularly in men—but any little bit helps," Tamler says.

Try and try again

Even if you don't lose weight or you regain some, preventing further weight gain is a plus. "The common trajectory of weight gain today is 2–4 pounds a year from a mere 50–100 extra calories a day," Ryan says. "People and their providers need to be aware that weight regain will happen and renewed attempts at weight loss can succeed."

Type 2 diabetes is progressive. Over time the ability to make insulin dwindles. Weight loss several years into having diabetes might help you improve blood glucose control or eliminate a blood glucose-lowering medicine. No matter when weight loss occurs, Aronne says, it's always easier to manage your diabetes at a lower weight. 



Hope Warshaw, R.D., CDE, coauthored the American Diabetes Association's *Diabetes Meal Planning Made Easy*, fourth edition (2010).