



## Pick Your Path to Health

### **Obesity in Asian Americans**

Overweight and obesity may not be infectious disease, but they have reached epidemic proportions in the United States, according to the *U.S. Surgeon General's Call to Action to Prevent and Decrease Overweight and Obesity*.

Asians and Pacific Islanders may think their risk for being overweight or obese is much lower, and weight control is no big deal. In fact, Pacific Islanders have the highest rate of adult obesity in the world. In addition, Asians and Pacific Islanders engage in less physical activity compared to the general population and their unique migration patterns affect their diet, reports the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute at the National Institutes of Health.

"Exercise is not on our agenda," says Lan Yin, referring to her lifestyle when she lived in China. "I used to ride a bike to go places, so physical activity was built into our everyday activities." Once she moved to the States, however, she had to make an effort to find the time to exercise. As a CPA, she works long hours and finds herself visiting many clients which doesn't allow for a predictable schedule to be able to work out.

In China, she explains, people don't go out jogging or to the gym, unless you're an athlete. "Here you have to make time just to exercise, which is something I struggle with," she said.

### **Your Are What You Eat**

People's eating habits change as they adjust to the Western culture. The typical Asian diet consists largely of rice, vegetables, and small amounts of meat and fish. As Asians assimilate to the American way of life, their fat consumption increases along with the chances of becoming overweight and obese, which can bring on health problems such as hypertension, high cholesterol, diabetes, and heart disease.

A healthy diet along with regular physical activity can truly make a difference to your health. There are simple actions you can take to improve your overall health, but it means making smart choices that, in turn, help establish lifelong healthy habits.

Lan Yin explains that one of the things that has helped her make a reasonably healthy transition to an American diet is that she doesn't consume dairy products, except for eggs. The scarcity of dairy products in China when she was growing up resulted in her inability of acquire a taste for it. "But that's not the case anymore," she explains. Dairy is much more widely available now which means people's diets are changing in China so younger generations are used to consuming more fat.

Overweight and obesity is not only a problem in adults. Today there are nearly twice as many overweight children and almost three times as many overweight adolescents as there were in 1980. The good news is that overweight and obesity can be prevented and can be corrected. Simply put, for the majority of individuals, overweight and obesity result from excess calorie consumption and inadequate physical activity. Your entire family can benefit by adopting healthy habits.

There are choices you can make when it comes to choosing what to eat and drink. For example, choosing a healthy drink to serve at family meals such as orange juice or milk instead of soda can go a long way. See for yourself the nutrients delivered by a 12-ounce serving of the following:

	Coca-Cola	Pepsi-Cola	Orange Juice	1% milk
Calories (kcal)	144	160	168	153
Sugar (g)	38	40	40	18
Vitamin A (IU)	0	0	291	750
Vitamin C (mg)	0	0	146	3
Folate (µg)	0	0	164	18
Calcium (mg)	0	0	33	450
Potassium (mg)	0	0	711	352
Magnesium (mg)	0	0	36	51
Phosphate (mg)	60	55	60	353

Source: Food Surveys Research Group

## **How to Measure Obesity**

### **Body Mass Index Chart**

Height-Weight Chart

<http://www.niddk.nih.gov/health/nutrit/pubs/health.htm>

A common way to classify overweight and obesity is Body Mass Index (BMI). It is a measure of weight in relation to height. The National Institute of Health (NIH) identifies overweight as a BMI of 25-30 and obesity as a BMI over 30. A BMI of 24 is considered healthy.

A woman who is 5'4" inches tall and weighs 140 pounds has a BMI of 24. A woman who is the same height and weighs 160 pounds has a BMI of 27, which would put her in the overweight category. (To calculate your BMI, multiply your weight times 703, divide the result by your height in inches, and then divide by your height in inches again.)

If you are overweight, losing as little as 10 to 20 pounds can help improve your health, by lowering your blood pressure and cholesterol levels.

At one point, we didn't know what fat did to our bodies; we thought that being overweight were signs of prosperity and well being. Now we know that obesity increases your chances for developing heart disease, stroke, diabetes and certain types of cancer.

### **Small Steps Can Help You Eat Healthy and Stay Active**

You gain weight because you ingest more calories than you burn off in a day. Start by eating plenty of fruits and vegetables and walking for 30 minutes three times a day.

Overweight and obesity is an epidemic you can avoid. Begin by making a small lifestyle change every week. In no time, you will be on a path to better health.

For more information, call National Women's Health Information Center toll-free at 1-800-994-WOMAN, or visit us at <http://www.4woman.gov>

Or you can call the Weight-control Information Network, a service of the NIDDK at 1-877-946-4627 or visit the Web site at <http://www.niddk.nih.gov/health/nutrit/win.htm>

*Pick Your Path to Health is a national public health education campaign sponsored by the Office on Women's Health within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. For more information about the campaign, please call 1-800-994-WOMAN or 1-888-220-5446 (TDD), or visit the National Women's Health Information Center at <http://www.4woman.gov/> To request weekly health tips by e-mail, click on the box that says, "Click Here for weekly health tips by e-mail."*