# Weight Cycling

NIDDK
National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases
NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH

WIN *Weight-control Information Network*

## What is weight cycling?

Weight cycling is the repeated loss and regain of body weight. This sometimes happens to people who go on weight-loss diets. A small cycle may include loss and regain of 5 to 10 lbs. In a large cycle, weight can change by 50 lbs or more.

## Is weight cycling harmful to my health?

Experts are not sure if weight cycling leads to health problems. However, some studies suggest a link to high blood pressure, high cholesterol, gallbladder disease, and other problems. One study showed other problems may be linked to weight cycling as well. This study showed that women who weight cycle gain more weight over time than women who do not weight cycle. Binge eating (when a person eats a lot of food while feeling out of control) was also linked to women who weight cycle. The same study showed that women who weight cycle were also less likely to use physical activity to control their weight.

Weight cycling may affect your mental health too. People who weight cycle may feel depressed about their weight. However, weight cycling should not be a reason to "feel like a failure." If you feel down, try to focus on making changes in your eating and physical activity habits. Keeping a good attitude will help you stay focused.

## If I weight cycle after a diet, will I gain more weight than I had before the diet? Will I have less muscle?

Studies do not show that fat tissue increases after a weight cycle. Studies do not support decreases in muscle either. Many people simply regain the weight they lost while on the diet—they have the same amount of fat and muscle as they did before the weight cycle.

Some people worry that weight cycling can put more fat around their stomach area. This is important since people who carry extra body weight around this area are more likely to develop type 2 diabetes. Studies show that people do not have more fat around their stomachs after a weight cycle. However, other studies suggest that women who

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## How can I manage weight and avoid weight cycling?

Experts recommend different strategies for different people. The goal for everyone is to achieve a healthy weight. This can help prevent the health problems linked to weight cycling.

- People who are not overweight or obese, and have no health problems related to weight, should maintain a stable weight.
- People who are overweight or obese should try to achieve and maintain a modest weight loss. An initial goal of losing 10 percent of your body weight can help in your efforts to improve overall health.

If you need to lose weight, be ready to make lifelong changes. A healthy diet and physical activity are the keys to your efforts. Focus on making healthful food choices, such as eating more high-fiber foods like fruits and vegetables and cutting down on foods that are high in saturated or *trans* fats. Walking, jogging, or other activities can help keep you active and feeling good. To find out more about a healthy diet and the amount of physical activity you need, check out MyPyramid, the Government's new food guidance system at *www.mypyramid.gov.*

are overweight and have a history of weight cycling have thicker layers of fat around their stomachs—compared to women who do not weight cycle. It is not clear how this relates to weight cycling.

## If I regain lost weight, will it be even harder to lose it again?

Losing weight after a weight cycle should not be harder. Studies show weight cycling does not affect how fast you burn food energy, which is called your "metabolic rate." This rate slows as we get older, but a healthy diet and regular physical activity can still help you achieve a healthy weight.

## Is staying overweight healthier than weight cycling?

This is a hard question to answer since experts are not sure whether weight cycling causes health problems. However, experts are sure that if you are overweight, losing weight is a good thing. Being overweight or obese is associated with the following health problems:

- high blood pressure
- heart disease
- stroke
- gallbladder disease
- fatty liver disease
- type 2 diabetes
- certain types of cancer
- arthritis
- breathing problems, such as sleep apnea (when breathing stops for short periods during sleep)

Not everyone who is overweight or obese has the same risk for these problems. Risk is affected by several factors: your gender, family history of disease, the amount of extra weight you have, and where fat is located on your body. You can improve your health with a modest weight loss. Losing just 10 percent of your body weight over 6 months will help.

## Conclusions

Experts need to learn more about weight cycling. Knowing if it is a cause or effect of poor physical and mental health is important. In the meantime, you can help yourself if you are overweight or obese. Try to eat a healthy diet and get plenty of physical activity. If you go through a weight cycle, do not feel like a failure. Just keep trying your best.

## For Further Reading


*Active at Any Size.* National Institutes of Health (NIH) Publication No. 04-4352. May 2004. Available from the Weight-control Information Network (WIN) and online at *www.win.niddk.nih.gov/publications/active.htm.*

*Binge Eating Disorder.* NIH Publication No. 04-3589. September 2004. Available from WIN and online at *www.win.niddk.nih.gov/publications/binge.htm.*

*Finding Your Way to a Healthier You. Based on the "Dietary Guidelines for Americans."* Published by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). DHHS Publication No. HHS-ODPHP2005-01-DGA-B. USDA Home and Garden Bulletin No. 232-CP. Available from the Federal Citizen Information Center at 1-888-878-3256 and online at *www.healthierus.gov/dietaryguidelines.*

*Just Enough for You: About Food Portions.* NIH Publication No. 03-5287. January 2003. Available from WIN and online at *www.win.niddk.nih.gov/publications/just_enough.htm.*

*Weight-loss and Nutrition Myths.* NIH Publication No. 04-4561. March 2004. Available from WIN and online at *www.win.niddk.nih.gov/publications/myths.htm.*

*Weight Loss for Life.* NIH Publication No. 04-3700. May 2004. Available from WIN and online at *www.win.niddk.nih.gov/publications/for_life.htm.*


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The Weight-control Information Network (WIN) is a national information service of the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK) of the National Institutes of Health, which is the Federal Government's lead agency responsible for biomedical research on nutrition and obesity. Authorized by Congress (Public Law 103-43), WIN provides the general public, health professionals, the media, and Congress with up-to-date, science-based health information on weight control, obesity, physical activity, and related nutritional issues.

Publications produced by WIN are reviewed by both NIDDK scientists and outside experts. This fact sheet was also reviewed by Rudolph L. Leibel, M.D., Professor of Pediatrics and Medicine, Head of the Division of Molecular Genetics, Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons.


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