

# HEALTH IN OUR HANDS!

The Arkansas State University Wellness Program Newsletter  
[www.clt.astate.edu/wellness](http://www.clt.astate.edu/wellness)



## Overview

One of the top New Year's resolutions every year is to lose weight or get in shape. 2011 is no exception to this rule. Getting in shape and losing weight ranked numbers two and three respectively. While losing weight and exercise are two key components in a healthy lifestyle, many people do not know how to take these steps in a healthy, appropriate way. If the appropriate steps are taken, injury and burn out can be prevented. Important steps to take when planning to start a weight loss and exercise program include: physician's clearance, assessing current fitness level, assessing current weight, and setting a fitness and nutrition plan.

## Physician's Clearance

Getting physician's clearance is an important aspect of starting a healthy weight loss and exercise program, especially if there is an underlying health condition or chronic illness. Understanding the effects of these illnesses on exercise and the body will help you to attack a fitness plan in a healthy way.

Physician's clearance is also important when returning to exercise from an injury. Starting

## A Healthy New Year

back exercise too soon or to aggressively after an injury can lead to re-injury.

Physician clearance or guidance may also be needed when starting a nutrition plan. Understanding the foods being introduced to the body and how they affect it can help enhance a weight loss plan when combined with appropriate exercise.

## Assessing Current Fitness Level

Before an exercise plan can be set-up, an initial fitness level must be determined. For the fitness level to be determined, a fitness assessment can be administered. Fitness assessments can be administered at any local gym or by a physician, if chronic illness or a healing injury needs to be monitored closely.

## Assessing Current Weight

Knowing current weight can help those setting-up a weight loss plan to set goals.

Understanding how weight affects the body is important in getting started toward a healthier weight.

Overweight is defined as having more body fat than is optimally healthy.

Approximately 64% of the United States adult population is considered either overweight or obese. The body-mass index (BMI) is generally the tool that is used to assess weight as compared to height. The number found by this measurement helps determine classifications of overweight or obese. This is the scale used by major health insurance companies when assessing a person's risk level. Other techniques can be used to assess body-fat, but BMI is the simplest and easiest.

A number of risk factors occur when a person is overweight or obese. The risk factors with both overweight and obesity are the same but are worse in those defined as obese. Common conditions associated with obesity include:

- Greater cancer risk
- Decreased psychological well-being
- Heart disease
- Sleep apnea

- Diabetes

These are just a few of the conditions that overweight and obese persons are at a higher risk for. For a more in depth list visit:

[http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/dci/Diseases/obe/obe\\_risks.html](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/dci/Diseases/obe/obe_risks.html)

### **Setting a Fitness Plan**

When setting up a fitness plan the first thing that must be decided is what type of exercise should be done. Doing activities that are enjoyable should be incorporated into a fitness plan. If the activities are enjoyable, retention of the fitness plan is increased.

Another consideration for setting up a fitness plan is previous injuries and chronic illness or conditions. For example, a person with rheumatoid arthritis should not take part in high impact activities during flare-ups, due to exacerbation of symptoms. More appropriate exercises would be swimming or the elliptical machine. A physician can give advice on appropriate exercise and intensity levels for those with chronic illnesses. Trainers in the gym are also able to advise on appropriate exercise programs for different chronic illnesses.

### **Set-up a Nutrition Plan**

In order for the body to function, calories must be taken in as protein, carbohydrates, vitamins, and minerals. An initial assessment of eating habits should be done when starting a nutrition plan. Once the initial assessment is done, an evaluation of the types of food being eaten can help the understanding of what types of

nutrients are being taken in through food.

Now that there is an understanding of eating habits and the foods being eaten, a proper nutrition plan can be set-up. It is important to remember not to completely prohibit those foods that are deemed “bad”. Allowing occasional treats, or rewards, can be good. The problem occurs when snacking goes overboard. Another important concept to remember when considering an appropriate nutrition plan is portion control. One of the biggest problems when it comes to food is portion control. In many restaurants, plates that are given at a meal are double the portion size that should be taken in. This means double the calories, double the fats, and double the carbohydrates. Excess carbohydrates, fats, and sugars are stored in the body as excess fat and weight.

The types of foods being taken in should be considered in a nutrition plan. Processed foods are worse for weight-loss than non-processed foods. Because these foods are already partially processed the body does not have to use as much energy to break them down. Energy in the body is measured in calories. It takes 3,500 calories to burn one pound of fat. Another important concept to understand is the importance of fiber and fats in the diet. When reading food labels, avoiding foods high in trans-fats and saturated fats is key when trying to start a healthy lifestyle. Poly- and mono-unsaturated fats are good fats that are believed to help lower cholesterol. The website [mypyramid.gov](http://mypyramid.gov) is a great

resource to help anyone get started on a proper nutrition plan. The trainers in your local gym may be a good source of knowledge when planning an exercise and nutrition plan, as well.

### **Article Resources**

- <http://www.slideshare.net/mrcoryjim/top-10-new-years-resolutions-2011-ep>
- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Overweight>
- [http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/dci/Diseases/obe/obe\\_risks.html](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/dci/Diseases/obe/obe_risks.html)
- <http://www.mypyramid.gov/>

### **Other News:**

### **Upcoming Events:**

\*\*If you have any suggestions for newsletter topics, please contact Dean Susan Hanrahan at [hanrahan@astate.edu](mailto:hanrahan@astate.edu).

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The Arkansas State University Employee Wellness Newsletter is published monthly during the academic year by the College of Nursing and Health Professions. Health questions can be addressed to Dean Susan Hanrahan, Ph.D., ext. 3112 or [hanrahan@astate.edu](mailto:hanrahan@astate.edu). Produced by Helen Grimes, graduate student in the College of Nursing and Health Professions, Physical Therapy Program.