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HEALTHY WEIGHT AND WEIGHT LOSS

Assessing your Weight:

If you are concerned about your current weight, changes in your weight over the last few years, or recent diagnosis that your doctor has discussed with you based on your weight, it is time to evaluate your current health status. Doctors use a system known as Body Mass Index (BMI) to determine if someone's weight is healthy. The BMI is based on your height and weight. BMI calculators can be found on many websites including at the Center for Disease Control (CDC.gov). Ideally, someone's BMI should be between 18.5 and 24.9. A BMI of 25 to 29.9 is considered "overweight". A BMI of 30 or higher falls within the "obese" category.

Another way to assess weight is to measure your waist circumference. A larger waistline indicates a higher risk of developing obesity related conditions. Ideally, a non-pregnant woman should have a waist circumference below 35 inches.

The Risks Associated with Overweight and Obesity:

When your weight is above the ideal body weight, research has shown that you have a much higher risk of certain serious conditions, including:

- Coronary heart disease
- Type 2 diabetes
- Cancers (endometrial, breast, and colon)
- Hypertension (high blood pressure)
- Dyslipidemia (high cholesterol)
- Stroke
- Liver and gallbladder disease
- Sleep apnea and respiratory problems
- Osteoarthritis (a degeneration of cartilage and its underlying bone within the joint)
- Gynecological problems (abnormal bleeding, infertility)

Losing Weight:

Losing weight is not easy and there are many reasons that someone may be overweight or having trouble with changing their lifestyle. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention suggests a 5 step plan for getting started.

- 1) Make a Commitment: This is often the most important factor in success for life changes. In order to change bad habits, it's important to make a commitment to yourself to be healthier. Many people find it helpful to sign a written contract committing to the process. The contract may include things like the amount of weight you want to lose, the date you would like to lose the weight by, and a plan for getting regular physical activity. It may also include your

motivation such as decreasing your blood pressure, improving your quality of life with your family, or the ability to start a family.

- 2) Take stock of where you are: Be honest about your current weight and the risks associated with that weight. It may also be helpful to keep a “food diary” for a few days to help you become more aware of the foods you are eating and when you are eating. It is also important to examine your current lifestyle and identify challenges that make it difficult to lose weight. Do you travel a lot or work long hours? Do you tend to eat the high fat, sugary foods that you purchase for your kids? Are you eating out frequently? Identifying these hurdles can help you find strategies for improving your daily habits.
- 3) Set realistic goals: Effective goals are specific, realistic, and forgiving. For example, “exercise more” is not a specific goal. If you say that you will walk 15 minutes, 3 days a week for the first week, you are setting a specific and realistic goal. Small changes every day can make a big impact in the long run. Remember that occasional setbacks may occur. It’s important to get back on track as soon as possible to avoid returning to bad habits.
- 4) Identify resources for information and support: In order to make major life changes, it’s important to include family and friends that can support your weight loss efforts. Some people do well with organized weight loss groups or programs. Ask your doctor for suggestions on diet modifications and exercise.
- 5) Continually “check in” with yourself to monitor your progress: It’s important to reevaluate your goals and adjust them to improve your chances of success. If your current method of exercise is not working for you, find a new activity that you enjoy and can stick with. Since this is a lifelong process, never fear changing things to improve the outcome.

There are many “diets” out there to consider. The research shows that almost all of these diet plans work as long as people stick with it for the long term. When deciding upon a weight loss diet plan, it is best to choose plans that incorporate a wide range of food selections including lean proteins and whole grains. So called “fad diets” that strictly limit your food choices often do not work since they are hard to incorporate into a lifelong commitment.

Finally, just as important as dietary modifications, exercise is necessary for long term weight loss and health and wellbeing. Not only does exercise burn calories to help you lose weight faster, it improves heart health, lowers blood pressure, lowers cholesterol, and improves mental wellbeing. Getting to and staying at a healthy weight requires both regular physical activity and a healthy eating plan.