Health comes in many sizes

# A Healthy Weight

A healthy weight is different for everyone. You don’t need scales to find out what it is. A healthy weight is what you are when you:

* eat a balanced diet
* eat most of the time because you are hungry
* move regularly in ways you enjoy.

We cannot measure health just by physical appearance, weight or waist circumference.

# What Does *Weight Neutral* Mean?

Body weight is often used as a measure of health – in the media, by friends and family, and by governments. A *weight neutral* approach challenges this focus on weight. It recognises that healthy bodies come in all shapes and sizes.

A person’s weight does not provide a representative picture of their health. There are a lot of factors that impact your body weight. This includes genetics, hormones, medications, diseases, age, the amount of sleep you get, your stress levels and your ethnicity. The number of kilos on the scale does not reflect these factors.

A weight neutral approach encourages a focus on those things we do that promotes health. Doing these things can help us to stay healthy and avoid chronic conditions, even if our weight stays the same:

* eat mostly from the five food groups
* listen to our bodies, when we are hungry or full
* move more
* sit less
* avoid or reduce alcohol
* get enough sleep.
* find enjoyable movement
* enjoy eating with family and friends

# Why be Weight Neutral?

Research suggests that intentional weight loss (dieting) is not a safe and effective way of supporting your health.[[1]](#endnote-1) Most people who diet to lose weight will regain the weight within five years[[2]](#endnote-2).

Striving for a certain body shape or weight goal can be harmful to mental health. People may lose motivation to eat well or be active if they fail to maintain or lose weight. A focus only on weight loss can increase the risk of negative body image and disordered eating.

People may also avoid going out with friends, playing sport, or even visiting the doctor if they fear being judged for their size or shape. A weight neutral approach to health is strength based and includes everyone.

A weight neutral approach may be particularly helpful for young people. During puberty and adolescence, young people’s bodies go through significant changes. Everyone goes through these changes at different times. You may find that being weight neutral helps you to be kinder to yourself and others because it challenges the idea that there is a ‘right’ way to look.

1. Royal Australian College of Physicians (2018) Action to prevent obesity and reduce its impact across the life course- RACP Position Statement on Obesity. Sydney: Royal Australian College of Physicians. Accessed online 24th August 2018 https://www.racp.edu.au/docs/default-source/advocacy-library/racp-obesity-position-statement.pdf [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. National Health and Medical Research Council (2013) Clinical practice guidelines for the management of overweight and obesity in adults, adolescents and children in Australia. Melbourne: National Health and Medical Research Council. P.160. Accessed online 24th August 2018

   <https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/about-us/publications/clinical-practice-guidelines-management-overweight-and-obesity> [↑](#endnote-ref-2)