

Choosing a Safe and Successful Weight Loss Program

A Responsible and Safe Weight Loss Program

If your health care provider tells you that you should lose weight and you want to find a weight loss program to help you, look for one that is based on regular physical activity and an eating plan that is balanced, healthy, and easy to follow. Weight loss programs should encourage healthy behaviors that help you lose weight and that you can stick with every day.

Safe and effective weight loss programs should include

- Healthy eating plans that reduce calories but do not forbid specific foods or food groups
- Tips to increase moderate-intensity physical activity
- Tips on healthy habits that also keep your cultural needs in mind, such as lower fat versions of your favorite foods
- Slow and steady weight loss (depending on your starting weight, experts recommend losing weight at a rate of ½ to 2 lbs [pounds] per week), while weight loss may be faster at the start of a program
- Medical care if you are planning to lose weight by following a special formula diet, such as a very low-calorie diet (a program that requires careful monitoring by a doctor)
- A plan to keep the weight off after you have lost it

Get familiar with the program.

Gather as much information as you can before deciding to join a program. Professionals working for weight loss programs should be able to answer the questions listed below.

What does the weight loss program consist of?

- Does the program offer one-on-one counseling or group classes?
- Do you have to follow a specific meal plan or keep food records?
- Do you have to purchase special food, drugs, or supplements?
- If the program requires special foods, can you make changes based on your likes and dislikes and food allergies?
- Does the program help you to be more physically active, follow a specific physical activity plan, or provide exercise instruction?
- Does the program teach you to make positive and healthy behavior changes?
- Is the program sensitive to your lifestyle and cultural needs?
- Does the program provide ways to keep the weight off? Will the program provide ways to deal with such issues as what to eat at social or holiday gatherings, changes to work schedules, lack of motivation, and injury or illness?

What are the staff qualifications?

- Who supervises the program?
- What type of weight management training, experience, education, and certifications does the staff

have?

Does the product or program carry any risks?

- Could the program hurt you?
- Could the recommended drugs or supplements harm your health?
- Do participants talk with a doctor?
- Does a doctor run the program?
- Will the program's doctors work with your personal doctor if you have a medical condition such as high blood pressure or are taking prescribed drugs?
- Is there ongoing input and follow-up from a health care professional to ensure your safety while you participate in the program?

How much does the program cost?

- What is the total cost of the program?
- Are there other costs, such as weekly attendance fees, food and supplement purchases, and so forth?
- Are there fees for a follow-up program after you lose weight?
- Are there other fees for medical tests?

What results do participants typically have?

- How much weight does an average participant lose, and how long does he or she keep the weight off?
- Does the program offer publications or materials that describe what results participants typically have?

If you are interested in finding a weight loss program near you, ask your health care provider for a referral or contact your local hospital.

National Institutes of Health (NIH), Weight-Control Information Network. (Updated 2008, April). In *Choosing a safe and successful weight loss program* (NIH Publication No. 08-3700). Retrieved October 18, 2010, from <http://www.win.niddk.nih.gov>