

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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Is Overweight Really So Great?

If you've been listening to the news you probably have heard about the new health report that says that overweight people live longer! Yippee! I wonder how many of us ran right out for a half gallon of ice cream and large pizza. If you haven't yet, please hang on a little bit longer before you do. The headlines are not the whole story, and the rest of it might not be quite so rosy. Here's why a lot of doctors and health experts are shaking their heads.

It's true that the researchers who did the project looked at numbers from lots of people, almost 3 million of us in fact. They collected almost 100 studies and lumped all the information together. More than a dozen countries were included. And they did try to correct for differences by age, gender and whether people smoked or not. Their results said that people who are slightly overweight actually live as long as or longer than those whose weight is counted as 'normal'. People over 65 got the biggest boost in lifespan if they were overweight. So, what's not to like about those results?

For one thing, information on people who smoke was included with those who don't. Smokers are often thinner. People smoke just to stay thin; people who stop smoking often gain weight. But there are very few today who would argue that smoking is good for your health! So, they might be thinner but they would also be more likely to die from smoking-related diseases such as cancer and heart problems. That makes the heavier people look 'healthier' than they really are.

Another point that many doctors are trying to make is that, while we're all on the way to getting heavier, medical science is getting much better at keeping us alive. The survival rates for people with cancers, heart attacks, strokes, diabetes and other weight-related illnesses is much better now than it used to be. So, while an overweight person with diabetes may survive longer, that doesn't mean that they are healthy. Partly because we have better treatments, and partly because there are so many risks tied to being overweight or obese, doctors are starting to treat problems earlier. So we survive longer. But if you can't lift your grandchild because you are too overweight and your heart is too weak, a report saying you're healthy is not going to make you happier, is it?

One last problem with the numbers from the big report is that many people lose weight when they are ill. Medications can take away our appetites. The illness itself may cause weight loss, and so can the effects of surgery. So maybe a lot of the thinner people who died earlier were all ready so sick they were losing weight from being sick. That kind of thinness is not what we want either.

Before you decide whether you should have that pizza and ice cream, take a look at the rest of your numbers. Weight is easy to measure and easy to see, but there are other indications of your health. If your cholesterol is great, your sugar is fine, you haven't touched a cigarette in years, and you can run a half marathon or keep up easily with the grandkids, then maybe those couple of extra pounds are not so important. But if your blood pressure is higher than recommended, if your blood sugar or cholesterol or triglycerides have 'been creeping up', even if your waist is larger than your hips, then probably you should pay more attention to the numbers on the scale. Remember, just a loss of 5% to 10% of your current weight can bring any of those numbers down a lot. At the very least, work harder at stopping any additional weight gain.

Here's a super-healthy salad to help prevent the weight creeping up. Make it in the afternoon or the evening before, so that it has time to marinate and get flavorful by dinner time. Prepared this way, Brussels sprouts are sweet and tender. Enjoy!

Brussels Slaw

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| ¾ pound small Brussels sprouts | 1 medium apple |
| ¼ cup chopped walnuts | ¼ cup lemon juice |
| ½ cup raisins or dried cherries or cranberries | pinch of salt |
| 1/8 tsp ground black pepper | 1 Tbsp olive oil |

Trim the sprouts, remove the outer leaves, and finely shred. Or cut in quarters and put through a food processor until they're shredded. Don't grind until they're mushy! Wash, peel and finely dice the apple. Combine shredded sprouts, apple, nuts, raisins, lemon juice, salt and pepper in large bowl and toss. Add oil and toss again. Cover and refrigerate at least 2-3 hours, or overnight to develop flavors. Serves 4-6.

Adapted from American Institute for Cancer Research.

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