

Why can't I lose weight?

I eat lots of pasta and very little red meat but I will soon be the size of a Hereford!

For more than a decade, the USDA Food Pyramid has symbolized the ideal diet: Eat lots of the good carbohydrates that make up the Pyramid's big, solid bottom and avoid the nasty meat and fat at the tip. You tried to do the right thing by matching your diet to the Pyramid, but now you've got a big, solid bottom of your own, and it's almost impossible to shed the extra pounds. Well, don't feel like the Lone Ranger – many people are experiencing the same problem.

Some experts, including the chairman of Harvard's nutrition department, say that the high-carbohydrate diet promoted by the USDA is actually causing obesity and related health problems including insulin-resistant diabetes. Other authorities defend the Pyramid and insist that high-protein/low-carbohydrate diets like Atkins, Stillman and Sugar Busters are dangerous quackery; these folks are still convinced that saturated fats and animal protein are very harmful and should be avoided. Yet you personally know people who have dropped pounds by eating cheeseburgers with bacon!

Is the FDA's Pyramid upside down? Frankly, we don't know. It's certainly intriguing that participants in a preliminary study conducted by Duke University lost weight and actually improved their cholesterol levels on the Atkins Diet, and other credible research points in the same direction.

We can all agree on this: The scientific community still has much to learn about nutrition. Remember the apple panic? The coffee scare? The egg fright? While waiting for the food police to resolve the pork chops vs. noodles debate, you won't get in trouble following the Aristotle Diet, also known as "Moderation in All Things." Nearly 24 centuries later, daily exercise, adequate sleep, and a varied diet that provides about the same number of calories as you burn still constitute a sound blueprint for the good life. ■

Coffee, whiskey and cigarettes: two out of three ain't bad

The truth is, moderate amounts of caffeine and alcohol are harmless pleasures for most healthy adults. Cigarettes, on the other hand, are truly deadly.

Caffeine: Found in tea, chocolate, coffee and cola drinks, caffeine stimulates the central nervous system and acts as a diuretic. People who are caffeine-sensitive may experience fast heart rate, frequent urination, tremors and sleep disturbances, but most healthy adults can safely consume moderate amounts of caffeine without side effects. The American Medical Association Council on Scientific Affairs has stated that "moderate tea or coffee drinkers probably have no concern for their health relative to their caffeine consumption provided other lifestyle habits are moderate as well." Some doctors advise patients with coronary disease and peptic ulcers, pregnant women, nursing mothers, women trying to conceive and those with fibrocystic breast disease to limit or avoid caffeine. Also, it makes sense to steer children away from cola and chocolate drinks for a number of reasons.

Alcohol: First the good news: Evidence to date indicates that alcohol, consumed in moderation, actually reduces the risk of cardiovascular disease. The bad news: Alcohol is linked to destructive behaviors (car accidents, fights, promiscuous sexual activity) and birth defects. Also on the negative side of the ledger, *heavy* drinking correlates with cancers of the esophagus, mouth, pharynx and larynx, and may be a factor in liver, breast and colon cancers. Recovering alcoholics, people with family histories of alcoholism and women who are pregnant or trying to conceive should avoid alcohol; personal moral objections aside, other healthy adults need not abstain from moderate use of alcohol.

Smoking: Cigarettes cause cancer, heart disease, emphysema and death – that's why they're called coffin nails. Consider these annual U.S. statistics: Cigarettes kill more than 400,000 people, one of every five deaths is related to smoking, middle-aged smokers are three times more likely to die of heart disease than nonsmokers, and male smokers are 22 times more likely to die from lung cancer.

So enjoy a cup of coffee or a glass of wine without guilt, but do yourself and the people who love you a big favor and stay away from cigarettes. Millions of people have quit smoking, and you can, too. Quitting smoking is painful, but it's a walk in the park compared to lung cancer. ■

Women's Health Facts

- Breast cancer is not the number one cause of death among women.
- The leading cause of death among women is heart disease, followed by lung cancer.
- Women who smoke increase their risk of heart disease and lung cancer.
- Cigarettes are an equal-opportunity killer.

It probably was something you ate

Influenza viruses do not cause the miserable condition known as "stomach flu." The collection of unpleasant symptoms (vomiting, diarrhea, cramps, headache, fever) commonly called stomach flu is usually caused by bacteria or viruses transmitted in food and water – these are not the same microbes that cause influenza.

Most people recover on their own from stomach flu, although children younger than five years, the elderly, and people with weakened immune systems may experience serious complications or even death. Consult a doctor if diarrhea lasts more than three days, or if you experience any of these symptoms: high fever (oral temperature over 101.5 F); blood in the stool; continued vomiting that prevents you from keeping liquids down; signs of dehydration (dry mouth and throat, dizziness upon standing, decreased urination).

Some pathogens (*E. coli* O157, *Salmonella*, *Listeria*, *Campylobacter*) that cause gastrointestinal distress live in livestock and poultry and in water contaminated by sewage. Other microorganisms, such as the Norwalk virus, are passed person to person by unsanitary practices; another group (*Staphylococcus* and *Botulinum*) produces toxins in improperly stored or cooked food. There's not much the average consumer can do to improve conditions at farms, food processing plants and restaurants, but the box at right lists twelve things you can do to prevent stomach flu.



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Just thinking about contaminated food, unsanitary practices and infected animals is enough to make a person sick, so it's reassuring that the number of cases of bacterial food-borne illnesses has declined 23 percent since 1996 according to the Centers for Disease Control. The fact that many serious food-borne illnesses (typhoid, tuberculosis, cholera, trichinosis) that plagued earlier generations have been largely eliminated in this country gives reason to believe that our food supply will eventually be rid of *E. coli* and *Salmonella*. ■

Smallpox – a big deal

- The world has been free of smallpox for a quarter of a century. The last case of smallpox was reported in Somalia in 1977; the disease has not been seen in the United States since 1949.
- Eradicating smallpox was a major medical achievement of the 20th century. Now we face the possibility that terrorists may deliberately unleash smallpox in the 21st century.
- Smallpox is a serious infectious disease that is sometimes fatal. People who contract this illness experience high fever, fatigue, headache, vomiting, skin eruptions, pustules and scabs.
- Fortunately, smallpox is not a very opportunistic virus: direct, prolonged, face-to-face contact with infected individuals is usually required to spread the illness, although it can be transmitted by infected body fluids and soiled bedding and clothing. Individuals afflicted with smallpox are contagious until all scabs fall off.
- Government policy requires that military and civilian personnel deployed in danger zones be vaccinated, and President Bush has urged emergency and medical workers to receive the vaccine. Other Americans will be vaccinated only if a smallpox outbreak occurs. According to the government, enough smallpox vaccine has been stockpiled to vaccinate everyone in the country if the need arises.
- At this time, the government is not recommending vaccination for everyone because the vaccine itself poses risk. For every 1 million people vaccinated for the first time, 1,000 will experience serious complications, 14-52 will experience life-threatening complications and one or two will die, according to the Centers for Disease Control.

The Healthy Dozen

1. Wash your hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and hot water after using the toilet, changing diapers or handling soiled bedding or clothing.
2. Don't share food, beverages or utensils with other people.
3. Use the dishwasher to sanitize dishes, glasses and utensils; if you must wash dishes by hand, air-drying is better than towel-drying.
4. Use household bleach to disinfect dishes, glasses, utensils, bathroom fixtures, clothing and bedding.
5. Cook ground beef to an internal temperature of 160 F; color is not a reliable guide, so buy a meat thermometer. Order well-done hamburgers when you're away from home. Ground beef dishes are problematic because the grinding process spreads bacteria throughout the meat; with steaks and other whole cuts, bacteria are confined to the meat's surface where they are killed by the direct heat of the oven, grill or stove.
6. Rinse fruits and vegetables thoroughly, especially those to be eaten raw.
7. Store eggs at 45 F or lower and cook them thoroughly (160 F), or buy pasteurized egg products; remember that unbaked dough and batters, Caesar salad dressing, eggnog and some pasta dishes may contain raw egg.
8. Drink only milk, juices and ciders that have been pasteurized.
9. Don't serve raw sprouts to young children, the elderly and people with weakened immune systems. Honey can also make babies ill.
10. Guard against cross-contamination in the kitchen: when you work with raw chicken, fish, eggs or ground meat, clean your hands, cutting board, utensils and bowls with soap and hot water before using them for other foods. Better yet, buy a second cutting board.
11. Refrigerate leftover food within two hours of serving; the maximum safe temperature for your fridge is 40 F. Food should be thawed in the refrigerator or microwave rather than on the kitchen counter. The refrigerator is also the right place to marinate meats; be sure to discard leftover marinade in which raw meat rested.
12. Use freezer packs and thermos bottles to keep school lunches at safe temperatures.

- Most authorities agree that adults who were vaccinated in the past have little or no residual immunity.
- Smallpox is frightening but you and your family are not at-risk unless terrorists deliberately release the virus, in which case the government is prepared to take quick action to protect American citizens. ■

Fat facts

- "Lipid" is another name for the fat that circulates in your blood.
- Fat is essential for good health; your body needs lipids for the production of cells, hormones, tissues, bile acid and other activities.
- Cholesterol is waxy fat; high levels of cholesterol in the blood are strongly linked to heart attacks and strokes. When the pipes in an old house are clogged with mineral deposits, the flow of water slows to a trickle; the same thing happens when there is too much cholesterol in the blood – fatty deposits called "plaque" stick to the blood vessel walls and restrict the blood flow.
- When the artery walls are clogged with plaque, the condition is called "atherosclerosis," or "hardening of the arteries." If

plaque blocks the heart vessels, a heart attack occurs. A stroke occurs when the brain's supply of blood is blocked.

- The cholesterol in your body is wrapped in protein so the cholesterol can be carried in the bloodstream; the wrappers are called "lipoproteins."
- Your total cholesterol level is the sum of high-, low- and very low-density lipoproteins present in your blood.
 - LDL (low-density lipoprotein) is a bad substance that creates plaque.
 - VLDL (very low-density lipoprotein) also creates plaque. VLDL is rich with triglycerides, a form of fat associated with cardiovascular disease and diabetes.
 - HDL (high-density lipoprotein) is good because it scrubs the plaque from the vessel walls.
 - High levels of LDL and VLDL are risk factors; high levels of HDL are welcome.

When cholesterol levels are high

Your own liver manufactures cholesterol, so it is not possible or desirable to eliminate cholesterol from your body. However, you should be able to attain a safe cholesterol level by exercising regularly and limiting the



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amount of fat you eat. If diet and exercise don't work for you, your doctor may prescribe a cholesterol-lowering drug to reduce your risk.

The simple truth

Since the 1970s, *all* fats have been branded as bad because it was easier to communicate that simple message than to teach Americans to distinguish between good and bad fats. However, the truth is not complicated: *unsaturated fat from vegetables is good and saturated fat from animals is bad.* Exceptions to the simple rule: Although they don't come from animals, coconut and palm oils are saturated fats and should be avoided.

One more important fact: trans-fatty acids are produced when oil is hardened into shortening and margarine by a process called "hydrogenation." You should avoid hydrogenated fats and products that contain them, particularly commercial baked-goods, because trans-fatty acids are linked with heart disease.

Food for thought

It's true that you should restrict your intake of hydrogenated and saturated fats, and you should be aware that all fats pack a lot of calories. However, fat is not poison – a handful of nuts or some olive oil on your salad will not kill you.

This just in . . .

Did you know that half the people who have heart attacks or strokes also have normal cholesterol levels? A growing body of evidence shows that inflammation may be the culprit.

Most middle-aged people, even those with low cholesterol levels, have some plaque. The current theory is that inflammation causes bits of plaque to break off and block arteries; as long as there's no inflammation, the plaque remains stable.

The jury is still out, but it's possible that inflammation plays as great a role as cholesterol in cardiovascular disease. ■

Help for people who have cancer

Great-West is introducing a support program for members with cancer. Our new oncology management program will help members understand their treatment options and side effects. In addition to technical expertise, the program will provide emotional support for cancer patients and their families. The program is designed to guide our members through the health care and benefits maze at a time when they're naturally worried and confused.

The care managers associated with our oncology management program are experienced professionals. They're familiar with the latest treatments and clinical trials because they're cancer specialists. The care managers are also equipped to provide information about benefits so members know what to expect financially. Best of all, the care managers have learned how to interact with people facing difficult times – they'll provide a sympathetic ear when members need it most.

The oncology management program, which is a voluntary program, will be provided at no cost to our members. Cancer patients will be invited to join the program by care managers who identify them from claim records, or members can self-refer. The program will be rolled-out beginning July 15, 2003, and will be available in all regions by September 15. ■

Saturated fats	Unsaturated fats	
	Mono-unsaturated	Polyunsaturated
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Butter • Cheese • Milk • Cream, sour cream, ice cream • Meat, poultry, fish, lard • Eggs • Coconut and palm oils 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Olive oil • Canola oil • Avocados • Nuts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safflower oil • Sunflower oil • Corn oil • Soybean oil • Margarine* • Shortening* <p>* also contains trans-fatty acids</p>



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