

Heeding the Warnings

By Suze Hargraves

We all know the best way to prevent accidents is to use caution. The people who design our roads put up big flashing signs and lights to remind us to use caution. Public places use bright colored cones, wide yellow tape and neon signage to warn us of impending danger. Still, we manage to slip on wet floors, crash at intersections, tumble down stairs and fall into holes all the while looking surprised. Often we subconsciously or consciously delude ourselves into thinking we know better or that warnings simply don't apply to us. Sometimes, we are just so busy doing other things that we don't even notice warning signs. Either way, it's a recipe for trouble.

Preventing a health crisis also requires us to use caution and heed warning signs. Some of those signs are subtle and some are very obvious. One obvious but very potent warning sign is body weight. WebMd reports: "If you are obese, you are more likely to develop type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol and triglycerides, coronary artery disease (CAD), stroke, and sleep apnea, among other conditions. If you lose weight, your risk for these conditions is reduced." Determining your best weight is more than looking at a chart to see how tall you are. Today we use measurements called BMI and WHR to help people get to a healthy body weight.

BMI (Body Mass Index) is calculated using this formula: $BMI = (\text{Weight in Pounds} / (\text{Height in inches} \times \text{Height in inches}) \times 703$. I don't know about you, but that's too much math for me. There are thousands of online BMI calculators that will do it for you. An easy one-stop site for BMI info is www.bmi-calculator.net. Once you get your number, you can determine whether or not it's a keeper or a reason for concern by checking the BMI chart on this site.

The second number is your Waist to Hip Ratio (WHR). The WHR equals the waist circumference divided by the hip circumference. Ideally this number should be 0.7 for women and 0.9 for men. More than that and you're at higher risk for health problems including respiratory problems, diabetes, heart disease, high cholesterol and stroke. This applies to men and women equally.

Getting to your correct numbers is critical to your health but remember you don't want to cause a whole passel of problems while you're trying to solve another. The Weight-Control Information Network reports that rapid weight loss (in excess of 3 lbs. per week for more than two weeks) can cause gallstones. Without enough calories you are subject to an abnormal heart rate (also fatigue, dizziness, light-headedness, shaking, headaches, confusion, inability to concentrate, irritability and feeling weak). Not enough fiber? Expect constipation. Too much protein or fat then stand in line for climbing cholesterol and cardiovascular risks. Respect your body and follow a sensible diet.

The same caution needs to be applied when starting an exercise program. Start slowly and go easy while you build balance, strength and stamina. Use common sense to avoid injury or other medical emergencies. Go to <http://www.webmd.com/diet/food-fitness-planner/default.htm> for a free online tool to help you achieve your weight loss and fitness goals. Please be sure to review any weight loss or exercise plan with your healthcare provider.

Don't ignore your body weight as a simple, yet incredibly effective, warning of trouble. By heeding this warning you can avoid the serious pitfalls that overweight and obesity can place in your path.

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