

How to lose weight in a wheelchair

Adults who use wheelchairs can find it harder to lose weight because they tend to use fewer calories through physical activity. But there are still changes you can make to achieve a healthy weight.

Being overweight or living with obesity puts you at higher risk of a range of serious health conditions, including [type 2 diabetes](#), [heart disease](#) and certain [cancers](#).

How to check your weight

Body mass index (BMI) is a useful measure of whether someone is a healthy weight for their height.

You can check your BMI by using our [BMI healthy weight calculator](#).

However, it's sometimes not enough to use BMI to check the weight of someone in a wheelchair, as this may not give the full picture.

If you're uncertain about your weight, talk to a GP. They will be able to tell you whether BMI is suitable for you and whether you're currently a healthy weight.

The GP can also help if you're not able to weigh yourself.

Losing weight in a wheelchair

The average man needs around 2,500 calories a day to maintain his bodyweight. The average woman needs around 2,000 calories a day.

If you're a wheelchair user, it's likely you'll need fewer [calories](#) than these guideline amounts. This is partly because you tend not to use the large leg muscles. And having less muscle means fewer calories are needed to maintain a healthy weight.

A GP or dietitian can help you to work out your daily calorie needs.

You may prefer to have the support of a community weight management service. You can ask your GP if one is available near you, or you can refer yourself.

Information:

Self-refer for help with your weight

If you need help managing your weight, you might be able to refer yourself directly to services that can help you, without seeing a GP.

To find out if there are any services in your area:

- ask the reception staff at your GP surgery
- check your GP surgery's website
- contact your integrated care board (ICB) – [find your local ICB](#)
- search online for NHS weight management services near you

Anyone who wants to use the service, which welcomes wheelchair users, is screened by a qualified weight management adviser who can tell you if the service is suitable.

For some people, a one-to-one programme may be available.

Tips for losing weight

Aim to lose between 0.5lb (0.25kg) and 2lb (1kg) a week until you reach your target weight. A healthy, [balanced diet](#) and regular physical activity will help you to maintain a healthy weight in the long term.

It's important to eat a balanced diet from across the food groups shown in the [Eatwell Guide](#) because, when you eat fewer calories, it can become more challenging to get enough nutrients, especially vitamins and minerals, from your diet.

A healthy, balanced diet should be based on the Eatwell Guide. This means:

- eating at least 5 portions of a variety of fruit and vegetables every day
- basing meals on potatoes, bread, rice, pasta or other starchy carbohydrates
- choosing wholegrain with less added sugar, salt or fat, where possible
- having some dairy or dairy alternatives (such as soya drinks and yoghurts) – choose lower-fat and lower-sugar options
- eating some beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat and other protein – aim for 2 portions of fish every week, 1 of which should be oily, such as salmon, sardines or mackerel
- choosing unsaturated oils and spreads, such as sunflower or rapeseed, and eating them in small amounts
- drinking plenty of fluids – the government recommends 6 to 8 cups/glasses a day – but try not to have drinks just before meals to avoid feeling too full to eat

If you're having foods and drinks that are high in fat, salt and sugar, have these less often and in small amounts.

However, it's important to remember that the Eatwell Guide is aimed at the general population.

Your dietitian or weight management adviser may have specific advice about portion sizes that are adapted for your particular disability. But this will still be based on a healthy, balanced diet.

If you do not eat meat, find out how to have a healthy [vegetarian diet](#) or [vegan diet](#).

Get active in a wheelchair

Regular physical activity helps to maintain a healthy weight, and it's also important for your general health and wellbeing.

Whatever your level of physical ability, there will be an activity or sport for you.

Try to choose activities that improve your heart health and muscle strength.

If you can, try to do:

- at least 150 minutes of moderate intensity aerobic activity every week
- strength and balance exercises on 2 or more days a week

Aerobic activity is particularly important when it comes to losing weight. This is an activity that raises your heart rate, gets you slightly out of breath and causes you to break a sweat.

If the gym appeals to you, there's a range of good options for wheelchair users. These can include rowing machines adapted for wheelchair use, and weight machines for resistance exercises.

The Activity Alliance runs the Inclusive Fitness Initiative (IFI), a scheme that ensures gyms are suitable for use by people with disabilities. [Find an inclusive gym on the Activity Alliance website](#).

Other options include swimming or wheelchair sports such as:

- basketball
- netball
- badminton

- boccia, which is a sport similar to bowls, in which leather balls are rolled towards a target
 - [find out more from Boccia England](#)

WheelPower is an organisation that helps wheelchair users get involved in sport. Find out more at [WheelPower: find a sport or activity](#).