**Day 20**

**Title: Know Your Numbers**

When we talk about weight, we usually focus on fat. Having too much body fat can put a strain on your joints and heart. It can also increase your risk of diseases, such as diabetes, high blood pressure, and heart disease. Having too much body fat can even be a burden, especially if it presents you from doing the things you want to do, or if it makes you feel not so great.

On the other hand, having too little body fat and weighing too little may also have undesirable effects on the body. In women, having too little body fat may cause changes in the normal menstrual cycle, or may stop it all together. You may also want to gain weight to look a different way, and may feel better about your body and appearance after gaining a healthy amount of weight.

**Keeping tabs on weight**

Like tracking what you eat and drink, there are benefits to tracking your weight and body fat. Weighing yourself gives you a quantifiable, measurable starting point. You may think to yourself, “I’m fat,” “I’m too skinny,” or “I think I’m pretty good.” But until you weigh yourself and compare that weight to medical advice, you won’t know for sure. Measuring gives you a starting point to work from. Then you can set goals and work toward achieving them.

Tracking your measurements regularly lets you know how much progress you are making. Ask yourself, “Am I losing as much weight as I wanted to this week?” If yes, then you’re doing the things you need to do. If not, what could be the cause? Are you eating the right number of calories? Are you less active this week than you were last week? Should you change what you’re doing? Tracking gives us unbiased information to use along our journey.

But what are the best ways to measure ourselves? Weight gives you a number to start from, but it doesn’t tell you much more. Say you weigh 200 pounds. Is that a healthy weight? Is it unhealthy? To know the answer to those questions, you need some context to give your weight more meaning.

**A number with meaning**

The Body Mass Index (BMI) puts your weight into context by making an adjustment for your overall size. It’s also the standard way to measure overweight and obesity.

[CALLOUT] According to the information you have entered, your BMI is [X] [/CALLOUT]

What does your BMI tell you? Researchers have found that a BMI within certain ranges correlates to certain risks for health problems. They break these ranges into four categories: underweight, normal/healthy, overweight, and obese. People who are outside of the normal/healthy category tend to have a higher risk for health problems. The BMI ranges for each category are:

* Underweight: BMI less than 18.5
* Normal/healthy: BMI within the range 18.5-24.9
* Overweight: BMI within the range 25.0-29.9
* Obese: BMI greater than 30.0

If you’ve heard about BMI before, you’ve probably also heard from people who argue it’s not a perfect measurement. It’s true that for the elderly and for people who lift weights and have very large muscles, BMI can be less accurate. For most people, however, it’s a very good measure and indicates general risk for certain health problems.

**Where you carry your fat matters, too**

Researchers have also found that for people who are overweight or obese, where they carry their extra fat matters. Carrying extra weight mostly in the abdomen has been found to cause an additional increase a person’s risk for health problems. While some people refer to this as being “apple-shaped,” health professionals call it “central obesity.”

The best way to figure out if you have central obesity is with an old-fashioned tape measure. Measure the circumference of your natural waist, right above your navel. The risk of health problems increases for women with a waist circumference greater than 35 inches (88 centimeters) and for men with a waist circumference greater than 40 inches (102 centimeters).

**A final word**

Carrying too much weight can increase your risk for certain health problems, especially if that weight sits around your abdomen. Measure yourself as part of today’s challenge and see where you are. Come back to these measurements periodically and see how you’re doing as you work toward your weight goal.

**Sources:**

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