

Guidelines for Choosing a Weight Loss Program

Changing habits isn't easy. If you are thinking of joining a weight loss program here's a guide to help you choose one that is nutritionally balanced, safe and effective over the long term.



Steps You Can Take

1. Don't be shy! Ask questions up front

You should know what to expect from a commercial weight loss program BEFORE you join. A healthy weight loss program will include all of these elements:

- Weight loss goal of no more than 2 pounds (1 kilogram) per week.
- Nutritionally balanced diet that includes all four food groups from "Canada's Food Guide" www.healthcanada.gc.ca/foodguide in adequate amounts for your lifestyle.
- Find out if the program encourages vegetables and fruits, whole grains, low fat dairy, lean meats & meat alternatives and small amounts of healthy fats.
- Regular physical activity plan and tips on how to get started.
- Advice for creating new healthy eating habits.
- Maintenance stage to help you enjoy a healthy lifestyle over the long term.
- Flexibility for your unique needs such as food likes & dislikes, allergies, eating out, cultural restrictions, etc.

2. Look for "Red Flags"

The weight loss industry is not regulated in Canada. It is up to you to choose a safe and trustworthy program. Here are some "red flags" that may tell you that a program does not meet your health needs or have your 'best interest' in mind:

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- Promises fast weight-loss (more than 2 pounds/ 1 kilogram per week).
- Recommends a very low calorie diet plan (below 800 calories per day) without medical supervision.
- Tries to make you dependent on their company products rather than teaching you how to make good choices from regular grocery store food.
- Does not encourage long term realistic lifestyle changes including regular exercise and a healthy diet.
- Weight loss counselors who do not have any training or qualifications.
- Employs salespeople who also act as "counselors". Weight management counselors may gain from sales commissions on company products. They should not be trying to sell you anything.
- Requires you to sign a long term expensive contract.
- Pressures you to sign up right away by offering a "special price".
- Fails to tell you about risks that may go along with weight loss or their specific program (for example: if you take prescription medication, it may affect you differently after you lose weight).
- Promotes unproven or false weight loss aids like starch blockers or fat-burners.
- Gives nutrition advice that does not seem healthy to you.

In general if it sounds too good or too easy to be true it probably is.

3. Decide if this weight loss program fits well with your lifestyle

Ask yourself the following questions:

- Can I see myself following the diet (menu) plan?
- Did I feel pressured to join from my initial contact with this company?
- Does the program provide support and follow up that I need to lose weight and keep it off?
- Does the diet and physical activity suit my lifestyle and health?
- Can I see myself being successful in this program?
- Have I been given details about costs, possible risks and amount of

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time needed to reach my goals?

- Will the program require changes to my lifestyle that (my family and) I can manage?
- Will I enjoy the changed lifestyle or simply endure it?

Weight loss programs not for you?

If you can't find a weight loss program that suits your lifestyle try a different approach. Look for a registered dietitian. A dietitian can review your diet, develop an individual meal plan and offer other resources to support your lifestyle changes.

- Dietitians are available at some community health centres, family health teams or through some employee assistance programs.
- Contact the Consulting Dietitians Network of Dietitians of Canada by telephone: 1-888-901-7776 or www.dietitians.ca/find.

Steps for Special Consideration

If you have a chronic condition speak to your doctor before you start with a weight loss program.

If you take prescribed medications weight loss may require a change in your dose of medication. Speak to your doctor.

Children, women who are pregnant or breastfeeding and seniors should talk with their health care provider or a dietitian before starting a weight loss program.



Additional Resources

- Health Canada, "Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide" www.healthcanada.gc.ca/foodguide
- Health Canada, "What is a Food Guide Serving?" www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/choose-choix/index-eng.php
- Public Health Agency of Canada, "Canada's Physical Activity Guide"

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www.paguide.com

- Dietitians of Canada "EATracker" - Get personalized feedback on your daily food and activity choices www.eatracker.ca
- Dietitians of Canada "Recipe Analyzer" - This is a tool can find the nutrient content of your favourite recipes, and see how many Food Guide Servings your recipe provides
www.dietitians.ca/public/content/eat_well_live_well/english/recipeanalyzer/recipeanalyzer.asp

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