

## Disability, Obesity and Weight loss



*"I have to be so careful with my weight – if I even put on just two or three pounds in weight it means I cannot bend so far and so cannot get my underwear on and off..."*

*"I used all sorts of excuses as to why I was overweight – my disability, lack of mobility and my pain. However, those have become my reasons to maintain my weight loss. I feel much more positive about my future now."*

It can be done! Simone lost 4½ stone (28.5kg) in three and a half years by calorie counting and increasing her exercise levels. At aged 50 and just 4ft 9" she reduced her weight from 14 stone (89kg) to 9½ stone (60kg). She started as a size 24 and is now a size 16.

Carrying around additional weight may cause problems for somebody who isn't disabled. Most able bodied people would find that an additional 5 or 6kg in weight wouldn't particularly limit them.

However, if you factor in shortened limbs or a requirement to transfer from a wheelchair, the additional weight suddenly creates a much greater problem. Already short arms have further to reach, mobility difficulties can be compounded by pain in load bearing joints (hips, knees and ankles). Vital daily living and personal care skills, such as being able to pull pants or lower garments up and down when going to the toilet. This may result in a partial or total loss of independence.

## Why eat healthy foods?

Choosing to eat healthy food prevents lifestyle diseases and gives you the energy to be alert throughout the day (both the brain and muscles).

## What is a healthy weight?

Whilst a BMI (Body Mass Index) Chart can provide a rough indication of how much body fat we are carrying and where one's body weight fits in the healthy body weight scale, many thalidomiders cannot use this to find the weight that they should be for their height because of their lack of limbs and/or large muscle groups. Waist circumference, however, provides a better indication of the health risks we may be exposing ourselves to.

### ***Waist measurement and risk for cardiovascular disease and diabetes***

<b>Men - waist measurement</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 37 in (94 cm) or less</li><li>• Over 37 in (94 cm)</li><li>• Over 40 in (102 cm)</li></ul>	<b>Risk</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Healthy</li><li>• Increased risk if other risk factors are present</li><li>• Significant increased risk</li></ul>
<b>Women – waist measurement</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 31.5 in (80 cm) or less</li><li>• Over 31.5 in (80 cm)</li><li>• Over 35 in (88 cm)</li></ul>	<b>Risk</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Healthy</li><li>• Increased risk if other risk factors are present</li><li>• Significant increased risk</li></ul>

## Why do you want to loose weight?

These are some of the reasons you may wish to consider:

1. Increasing mobility/flexibility/function - independence and participation
2. Overuse/wear and tear on the body (shoulders and arms) “Looks” and self-esteem
3. Injury risks – to carers / nursing staff
4. Sleep improvement
5. Reducing pain levels

## Losing weight safely and effectively

There are many ways to lose weight, but the simplest and most effective way to lose weight is to change what we eat. In order to maintain weight, we need to learn what we should be eating – both the quantity and the quality.

### Ways you may wish to consider to help you lose weight:

- On your own - there are weight loss apps such as myfitnesspal
- Ask your GP to refer you to a dietician who will advise you on how much to eat and how to lose weight safely and consistently.
- Support from others. Slimming clubs such as Weight Watchers or Slimming World.
- On-line weightloss sites such as [www.weightlossresources.co.uk](http://www.weightlossresources.co.uk)

### Adapt your fuel intake to who you are!

#### *Adapt your fuel intake to who you are!*



David  
Physically active  
No physical impairment  
39 years  
174 cm , 68 kilograms



= big muscle mass  
= big engine  
= needs a lot of fuel



David  
Mobility problems, can not walk  
39 years  
174 cm, 62 kilograms



= smaller muscle mass  
= smaller engine  
= needs less fuel



David  
Mobility problems, can not walk  
39 years  
174 cm, 98 kilograms



= too much fuel

How much we can eat to maintain a healthy weight is governed by our gender, age, how active we are, our body composition as well as a genetic component that influences metabolic rate.

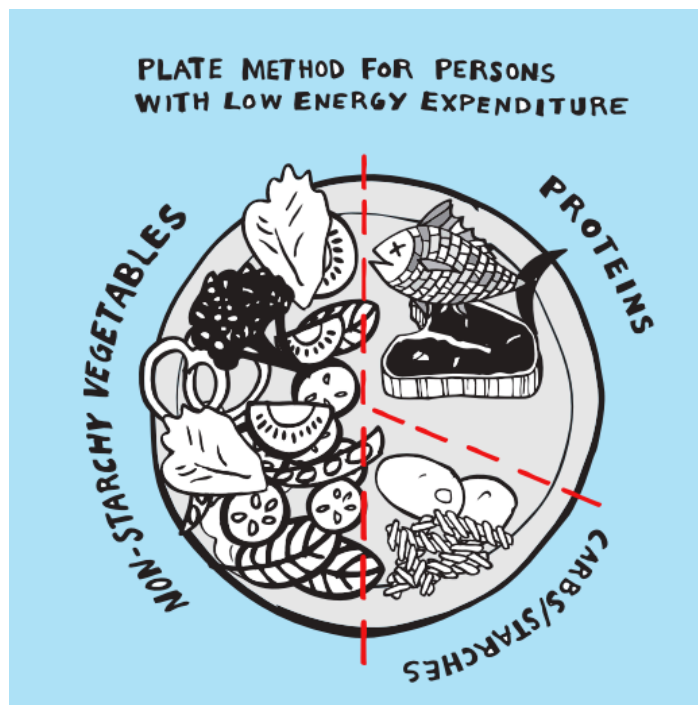
Thalidomiders with reduced mobility or who are less active will not be able to eat the same as their able bodied peers without gaining weight. Add to that the fact that many of us have become less mobile and less active as we have

aged, and once again, the amount of energy (food/calories) we need to consume is reduced.

### “Less but better”

A simple way to reduce our calorie consumption is to adopt the concept of “less but better” food. The adapted plate method is a simple way to change what we eat. Using a smaller plate (17-19cm) ensures that you have less on the plate but the visual appearance “tricks” the eyes and the brain into thinking that you have plenty!

According to the plate model, your plate should comprise:



- **Protein**, such as lean meat, fish, poultry or eggs. Amount: the size of your palm (pack of playing cards).
- **Carbohydrates**, such as pasta, rice , grains , potatoes and other root vegetables. Amount: the size of your palm .
- **Vegetables**, This section is free! You can eat as much as you want! This should be fibrous and filling food that helps to make you feel full without the unnecessary calories.

The plate model helps you remember amounts and proportions. When you eat out, you can ask for extra vegetables and a smaller quantity of potatoes, pasta or rice.

Try to reduce the amount of unhealthy food that you eat and increase the amount of healthy foods.

**Increase: high nutrient density (and low energy density to enable you to stay within your calorie allowance)**

Vegetables (dark green, red and orange, beans and peas)

Fruit

Protein (lean meat/poultry, fish, eggs, unsalted nuts and seeds)

Whole foods / whole grains

Fat-free and low fat milk and products

Replace solid fats with oils.

Concentrate on foods that provide higher levels of potassium, dietary fibre, calcium and Vitamin D.

*Why? These foods will make you feel fuller for longer. Dietary fibre aids the digestive process.*

**Reduce: low nutrient density and high energy density foods**

“Fast” foods, processed carbohydrates – foods that contain refined grains/flour, millet, maize, sorghum and wheat

Sugar

White rice

*Why? These foods don't make you feel full, so it's very easy to over-eat. They act like sugar within the body, raising blood sugar levels which activates the hormone insulin, which in turn increases the amount of body fat that is stored.*

## Alcohol

In general, most alcoholic drinks are high in calories, but alongside this, they provide few other nutrients. This means your half bottle of wine each day is using up a significant block of calories from your daily calorie allowance but giving you little in the way of vitamins, minerals, protein or fibre - effectively, you're getting around 250 'empty' calories each day.



In contrast, spend that 250 calories on 5 tbsp branflakes with skimmed milk and a small banana, and this meal would also provide you with 19 percent of your needs for protein, 34 percent for fibre, 21 percent for calcium and 56 percent for iron. In other words, you'd get a lot of other nutrients for those 250 calories.

Added to this, of course, is the fact that consuming too much alcohol is bad for health and can cause kidney and liver damage in the long term and increase the risk of accidents in the short term. Health guidelines recommend that both women and men consume no more than 14 units of alcohol a week.

Drinking too much alcohol can also increase your appetite (that's why aperitifs are served before a meal), whilst at the same time weakening even the strongest dieting resolve.

After a few drinks, you'll be less likely to say no to that packet of peanuts or cream with your dessert, and depending on how much you've had, even that kebab or fish and chips on the way home will seem like an attractive option.

*Why not try limiting alcohol consumption to weekends only?*

### **Tips to help you to maintain or reduce weight.**

1. Try to get to a good variety of food. The most important thing is to eat foods that fill you up for the least calories.
2. Avoid simple carbohydrates. Choose foods with a low glycemic Index (GI). These will keep you feeling fuller for longer, eg, butterbeans, lentils, wholemeal pasta, grapefruit, cherries, banana, oat bran, etc.
3. Drink plenty of water. Drink water with every meal and when you are thirsty.
4. Use a smaller plate, ideally about 17- 19 centimeters. Using a smaller plate will make portions look more generous, even though you'll be consuming less than you usually eat.



5. Eat regularly. This is essential to regulate your appetite and avoid feeling overly hungry. Don't skip meals.
6. Don't be afraid to feel hunger. If you feel hungry after you've eaten a meal, drink a glass of water, wait 20 minutes and then see if you are still hungry.
7. Avoid drinking large amounts of fruit juice or smoothies. These are high in sugar. Limit fruit to no more than two pieces a day.
8. Have a little of what you fancy. If you fancy a slice of cake, cut it into quarters, take a quarter and throw the rest away. Decide if you REALLY want that treat MORE than you want to lose weight. You may enjoy the treat at the time, but the positive feelings of being able to say "no" to high calorie treats lasts longer than the few seconds of pleasure when eating it – and the feelings of guilt that follow may lead to a binge.
9. Don't buy multi-packs of treats. Just buy one. Don't keep things in the house that you know you can't resist (biscuits, cakes, crisps, sweets, etc).

## Physical Activity

Increasing your levels of physical activity will burn more calories. If you struggle to eat within your calorie allowance, then you'll need to increase your levels of physical activity:

To burn 150 calories (equivalent to the calories in 1.5 glasses of wine, butter for three sandwiches or 1.5 bananas) you need to:

- Propel your wheelchair for more than 50 min (outside at a good speed)
- Walk briskly for 30 min

For those who find it difficult to leave the house, there are several ways to increase physical activity indoors. An example would be dance therapy, which is something that almost any disabled person can do. Just play your favourite tune and dance to the beat. Even if you can only do it with your upper body,

there will be an increase in your activity level and once started, you might find the activity to be so enjoyable that you would not want to stop.

Physical activity and exercise:

- very important for your overall health!
- Exercise should not be used as a method of weight loss (although exercise helps burn calories!)

For your health's sake

- try to increase your everyday physical activity!

*See the separate information sheet on EXERCISE for further information.*

***Finally: Top tips for losing weight from a spinal cord injured man who lost 36kg (5 ½ stone)***

- Count calories. (I tried to keep myself between 900–1,300 calories per day)
- Keep a food diary
- Reduce portion sizes
- Eliminate food stuffs that contain sugar
- Drink water with your meals
- Eat regular meals
- Weigh yourself at least once per month
- Try to find fun things to do instead of sitting at home feeling sorry for yourself and snacking on sweets and crisps while watching TV.

Weight loss is something that many of us will continue to battle with throughout our lives. The sooner we are able to find a way to lose excess weight and to maintain a healthy weight once we are there, the sooner we can start to enjoy a healthier and more fulfilled future.

*“The last thing I want to do is put on loads of weight and then I can’t use my feet. That’s why I go to the gym... and the social life as well.... I’m struggling with a lot of aches and pains in joints now, a lot of soreness you know, bad back, bad knees and we’re going to make it twice as worse if we put on a lot of weight.”*



*“The medical treatments are great and they make me feel so much better and they enable me to carry on exercising at a level that keeps my weight down, which means I’m independent because I can get my clothes on and off and do all that stuff.”*

**IT'S NOT A DIET**  
**IT'S NOT A PHASE**  
**IT'S A PERMANENT LIFESTYLE CHANGE**

The information and advice presented in these pages was developed by beneficiaries and advisers as a result of their participation in the Fit for the Future event held in April 2016. It is based on the advice and experience of those living with Thalidomide damage and those who work alongside them.

It is always advisable to talk to your own GP before embarking on an exercise or diet regime. The Health & Wellbeing team at the Trust are also available to support you with all aspects of living well and can provide further information and advice based on your specific needs. Please don't hesitate to contact them on 01480 474074.