

The 30 Pound Club

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December 12, 2010 – Grand Rapids, MI

BMI and Early Death

The most significant risk factor for death is: age! I hope that got your attention because there is little we can do to stop time. That's one of the subtle conclusions I came to after reading a study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* (1). But the over-all conclusion of the study was simple: the heavier you are, the higher the death rate from all causes, including cardiovascular disease, and cancer. Let me tell you a little bit about this study.

The Study

Researchers combined data from 19 studies to examine the relationship between Body Mass Index (BMI) and mortality—the death rate. I'm not a fan of meta-analysis, but this was a little different. They included data only from very large studies that met very strict criteria. As a result, they included 1.46 million white adults in the study between the ages of 18 and 84 years. They used only white subjects because they believe race may have an impact on BMI and mortality. If you're Black or Asian, don't feel bad. They will be publishing the data on your race, soon but I don't think it's going to be significantly different; we're all fat and we're paying the price.

What kind of price? We die before we should. As BMI increased, so did the death rate. It went up across all age groups, although there were fewer deaths in the younger age groups than there were in the older ones. The healthiest BMI was 22.5 to 24.9; from that point, as BMI increased, so did mortality. The death rate was highest from cardiovascular disease. That makes sense because carrying extra fat really taxes your heart and blood vessels.

One more point. As the BMI went below 20.0, mortality also increased slightly. This is the same type of J curve that was seen years ago in the old Metropolitan Life Height-Weight tables. I can remember having many discussions about how inaccurate those were. While BMI is a gross measurement that uses only height and weight, I think it's time to stop arguing and start paying attention. Even if people under-reported weight and over-reported height, having a pool of close to 1.5 million subjects smoothes that out.

My Thoughts

A long-time reader asked me what the healthiest BMI would be for him. He was going to join a city-wide group in his hometown to see how much weight they could lose. He chose the lowest BMI (20.0) for his height as his weight goal. I thought it was a mistake because it takes an extraordinary effort to do that, and inadvertently dropping below 20 could be dangerous; what if he gets to 20, then gets some kind of wasting disease and drops even lower? Staying in the healthiest range of 22 to 24 is probably the best goal for most of us.

Another long-time reader finally achieved his weight-loss goal after working at it for a couple of years. It took a consistent effort, modifying what he ate and how much he exercised to get there. But he did it. The key was permanently changing his lifestyle. That's what the 30 Pound Club is all about. No diet and no 90-day fitness plans; nothing temporary. Permanently changing your lifestyle will change your weight—permanently.

As the New Year approaches, I think that choosing a target BMI of 22 to 24 is a good goal, knowing that it may take longer than a year to get there. As you work toward your goal, keep in mind that for every tenth of a percent

you drop your BMI, you're reducing your risk of dying before you should. But more than that, you get to really live every day you're alive.

Twitter and Facebook

As I continue to get familiar with Twitter, I can see that it can be a great support tool for the 30 Pound Club. The critical factor in permanently changing your weight is paying attention long enough to get there.

I'm not going to achieve a 30-pound loss in 2010; I'm disappointed, but I've learned more ways not to do it. I'm going to continue the 30 Pound Club in 2011 and get it right for myself. I hope that you'll join me again if you haven't reached your goal. I'm going to use Twitter for frequent reminders, tips, and motivation in 2011; if I have to write them, it helps me get on track and stay there. I hope it will help you as well. If you're not on Twitter, get it done. Follow me @drchetz.

As 2010 winds down, it's great to see so many people on the 30 Pound Club Group on Facebook reaching their goals—and some who haven't got there but aren't giving up. Go to Facebook and get in on the conversation.

One and Done.

What are you prepared to do today?™

Dr. Chet

Reference: NEJM 2010; 363:2211-19



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