

HealthTalk: Weight Loss and Diet

By Karen Collins, MS, RD, CDN
American Institute for Cancer Research

Q: How much weight does an overweight person have to lose in order to achieve any health benefit?

A: Even modest loss, without necessarily getting down to a weight targeted in healthy weight charts, can bring health benefits if you maintain that loss. Research consistently shows that a five to seven percent weight loss – 10 to 14 pounds for someone who weighs 200 pounds – is enough to lower blood pressure, reduce risk of diabetes and substantially improve blood sugar and insulin levels in those who already have diabetes. In the Diabetes Prevention Program study, small weight loss decreased risk of diabetes. HDL (“good”) cholesterol levels have been shown to increase, thus reducing heart disease risk, with losses of 15 to 30 pounds. In addition, overweight people generally report that even modest weight loss makes a difference in their breathing, joint pain and ability to get around. So don’t hold yourself back with overly ambitious goals: Target a few changes you need to reach a modest loss and then focus on maintaining that new weight. Then you can decide if you want to make further changes to go another step lower in weight, again focusing on maintaining whatever loss you achieve.

Q: What’s the nutritional difference between tomato sauce and those jars labeled “pasta sauce” or “spaghetti sauce”? It seems like the jarred sauces are quite a bit higher in calories.

A: Part of the reason for the calorie differences you see on labels of tomato sauce and pasta sauce is the legally mandated portion size. The nutrition information for tomato sauce applies to a quarter-cup serving, whereas the nutrition data for the jars of pasta sauce refer to a half-cup serving (twice as much). However, even in equal amounts, commercially prepared pasta sauce usually contains added vegetable or olive oil, which adds calories not found in tomato sauce. Furthermore, tomato sauce is generally made only from tomato paste diluted with water, plus some salt and other flavorings, so the sugar on the label is only the sugar naturally occurring in tomatoes. Most pasta sauces contain about one to one-and-a-half teaspoons of sugar per half-cup serving. Looking beyond calories, most commercial pasta sauces contain more added salt than plain tomato sauces. Many of these prepared pasta sauces contain 620 to 640 milligrams per

half-cup, more than a quarter of the recommended maximum for the whole day, and nearly half of the recommended limit for the elderly and people with high blood pressure. Since tomato sauce is often less expensive than commercial pasta sauce, you might consider using tomato sauce and adding your own garlic, onion, herbs or spices.

###

The American Institute for Cancer Research (AICR) is the cancer charity that fosters research on the relationship of nutrition, physical activity and weight management to cancer risk, interprets the scientific literature and educates the public about the results. It has contributed more than \$91 million for innovative research conducted at universities, hospitals and research centers across the country. AICR has published two landmark reports that interpret the accumulated research in the field and is committed to a process of continuous review. AICR also provides a wide range of educational programs to help millions of Americans learn to make dietary changes for lower cancer risk. Its award-winning New American Plate program is presented in brochures, seminars and on its website, www.aicr.org. AICR is a member of the World Cancer Research Fund International.