

Almost half of americans are trying to lose weight: CDC

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(HealthDay)—The latest national tally on dieting finds that nearly half of

U.S. adults are doing what they can to trim a widening waistline.

Overall, 49.3 percent of people aged 20 and older said they'd tried to lose weight over the past 12 months, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The findings were based on a 2015-2016 national health survey, the latest data available.

The new stats reflect a significant increase from prior surveys. For example, 43 percent of American adults were trying to slim down in 2007-2008, but the numbers have crept steadily upwards every year since, the CDC said.

Attempts at weight loss were higher for women than men in the latest survey (56.3 percent and 42.2 percent, respectively), but over time rates of increase have been steady for both genders.

Why are more Americans than ever concerned about overweight and obesity? Registered dietitian Stephanie Schiff cites multiple reasons.

First off, "we are more sedentary than ever before," said Schiff, who guides the nutrition program at Northwell Health's Huntington Hospital, in Huntington, N.Y. "Our entertainment is more likely to occur while we are sitting—in front of the TV, in front of a computer, in bed with our phones in our hands."

Next, "we're not cooking our own [food](#) as much, we're eating out more," she said. "And when we don't have a hand in our own meals, we don't have control over what goes into it—others do. And they add more fat, more sugar, more salt."

Increasing stress levels can also "play havoc with our metabolisms," Schiff said, and that can prompt people to overeat. Sleeplessness is another known risk factor for poor eating, she added.

So what works to get slim and keep the weight from coming back? Sharon Zarabi is a registered dietitian who leads the bariatric program at Lenox Hill Hospital in New York City.

She believes the key is to incorporate healthy living habits that last a lifetime—not just a fast fix.

"I try to avoid using the word 'diet,' as it is something you manage for a short period of time based on food intake," she said. Instead, Zarabi said, she would "encourage more healthy living, which focuses on incorporating rituals to define a new sense of optimal well-being to feel good for life."

"You follow a diet when you want to lose weight—and then what?," she said. "Lifestyle is what keeps the weight off, and that comes through our behavior."

Schiff agreed. She noted that even the faddiest, "odd" diets can work to drop pounds, but then those pounds come creeping back.

"Because eating only 500 calories a day may not be sustainable, or eating only certain foods for your blood type," she explained.

The real solution is finding "a way of eating that is natural and has you feeling satisfied" over the long term, Schiff said. That means including foods you actually enjoy.

Sticking to plant-based foods and avoiding refined sugars, refined flour and chemically processed foods works best, Schiff said.

"Sometimes it also means changing your environment—getting rid of problem foods in your house, the foods you have no control over, or that you eat just because they're there," she said.

The bottom line, she said, is to "make changes that you know you can live with for the rest of your life."

And don't forget exercise. Exercise can help boost weight loss, but more importantly it's a way of "keeping your body finely tuned and healthy and strong," Schiff said. And with exercise—especially resistance exercise—if weight does come back, it will return as healthy muscle, not fat, she said.

The new stats on [weight loss](#) were published Oct. 18 in the CDC journal *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*.

More information: Stephanie Schiff, RDN, Northwell Health's Huntington Hospital, Huntington, N.Y.; Sharon Zarabi RD, bariatric program director, Lenox Hill Hospital, New York City; Oct. 18, 2018, *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*

There's more on maintaining a healthy weight at the [U.S. National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute](#).

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