



## QUESTION & ANSWER

*JoAnne asks: "I am trying to monitor my caloric and alcohol intake. Is there a proper measurement based on my weight and height? I am 48 and 5' 4" tall weighing 138 lbs. There is a history of heart problems in my family and I am trying to maintain a healthy lifestyle."*

At 5'4" and 138 lbs. your body mass index (BMI) is 23.7 (to calculate your BMI see [www.nhlbisupport.com/bmi](http://www.nhlbisupport.com/bmi)). BMI is a measure which relates weight to height and indicates a normal body weight when it is in a range of 18.5 – 24.9. BMIs of 24.9–29.9 are considered overweight and BMI's over 30 are considered obese.

For an individual with a normal BMI, the goal would simply be to not gain weight. Most experts would consider a daily caloric intake of around 2,000 calories as desirable for the average person. This suggestion, however, assumes a daily caloric expenditure of 200-300 calories. If your caloric expenditure is less, fewer

calories should be consumed. If your caloric expenditure is greater, more calories would be allowed. A visit to a registered dietitian who can estimate your caloric intake and expenditure can be very helpful in making this determination. Given your family history of heart problems, a dietitian would also be helpful in choosing the optimal composition for a heart healthy diet.

*Johnathan asks: "I have been diagnosed with an enlarged heart. It seems to run in my family, along with other problems including obesity. I just tested the scale online to see what my BMI index is and it states that I am obese (32 score). I don't think I look obese but that is probably due to my parental and family inflections. How can I reduce my weight safely and extend my life?"*

A diagnosis of an enlarged heart is somewhat non-specific and may indicate the presence of a condition called a cardiomyopathy. A cardiomyopathy is a weakening

of the heart muscle from a loss of muscle fibers. Sometimes this loss of muscle fibers is a diffuse process, that is scattered fibers are lost throughout the heart muscle with the overall effect being less forceful contraction. Sometimes the loss of muscle fibers is primarily in one area, as for example the loss of muscle fibers in one wall of the heart from a heart attack.

In either case, the heart is weakened and not as capable of pumping blood. Obesity will exacerbate such a weakness because adipose (fat) tissue has an increased number of very small blood vessels and increases the strain on the heart to pump blood through it.

For an individual with a cardiomyopathy and obesity, weight loss is thus very important. The weight loss, however, must be done slowly and carefully and the sodium content of the diet is especially important. A registered dietitian can be very helpful in bringing about safe and effective weight loss.