

Head-to-toe health boosts

You know that losing weight is good for you – but did you realise how good? From your memory to your breathing, shedding pounds if you're overweight can have positive effects all over your body...

Words: **Helen Foster** Illustration: **Katharine Asher**

Lungs Losing 5-10 per cent of your weight has been shown to reduce breathlessness and improve lung function. 'This can make a big difference to your day-to-day life,' says Slimming World dietitian Carolyn Pallister. 'Being able to walk upstairs without getting out of breath sounds simple, but it can be life changing.'

Back While being overweight can make you more prone to back pain, slimming down and moving more can help prevent it in the first place. And it can speed up your recovery: 'Losing weight removes extra pounds that are hard work for our muscles and spine to carry,' says Tim Allardyce, clinical director of Surrey Physio.

Liver Shedding pounds helps prevent fat building up in the liver. 'If not dealt with, fatty liver can cause scarring and, in some circumstances, lead to liver cancer or liver failure,' says Vanessa Hebditch, from the British Liver Trust. The good news? 'By losing weight, many people are able to reverse damage and restore their liver to its normal state.'

Bowel According to the UK charity Beating Bowel Cancer, there's stronger evidence than ever that being overweight increases your risk of developing the disease. Being a healthy weight may help protect you from bowel cancer, and eating plenty of fruit, veg and wholegrains can reduce your risk, too.



Brain Not only could maintaining a healthy weight help keep the brain working nicely as you get older, it can also perk it up – research suggests memory and executive function (the mental processes that help us get things done) can both improve after weight loss.

Heart Slim down and the benefit to your heart is actually visible, say doctors at Washington University School of Medicine in the US. Their study found that losing 5-10 per cent of body weight was linked to a decrease in heart size and artery thickness – which are both good news for your heart attack risk.

Breasts 'If you're overweight, losing five per cent of your body weight or more – and keeping it off – lowers your risk of breast cancer by 25-40 per cent,' says Dr Michelle Harvie, research dietitian from Prevent Breast Cancer.

All-over benefits

It's not just specific parts of your body that get a boost when you slim. 'Losing weight helps protect us from a number of health problems – and losing just 5-10 per cent of your body weight (and keeping it off) can start to bring benefits,' says Slimming World dietitian Carolyn Pallister. Here are just a few:

- **Type 2 diabetes:** Losing excess weight helps improve how your body responds to insulin and, according to a US study, for every kilo you lose, your risk of developing Type 2 diabetes reduces by 16 per cent. That's right, every kilo – which is a little over 2lbs.

- **Fertility:** 'Being a healthy weight improves your chances of getting pregnant, both naturally and through IVF,' says Narendra Pisal, consultant gynaecologist at London Gynaecology. Extra weight can upset the balance of hormones that affect fertility, such as oestrogen and insulin.

- **High blood pressure:** If you're overweight, losing

weight cuts your risk of developing high blood pressure – and if it's already high, helps bring it down. That means a lower risk of heart problems or stroke, as well as good news for your kidneys, eyesight and sexual function.

- **Libido:** 'One benefit people don't expect as they lose weight is the impact on their sex life,' says Carolyn. 'In a survey of Slimming World members, the number of women having sex at least once a week rose from 44 per cent to 57 per cent after they started losing weight. And men reported feeling more confident about sex.' It seems that slimming down helps both sexes get their sexy back!

Knees 'If your BMI is 30 or more, you're more likely to develop osteoarthritis of the knee,' says rheumatologist Professor Philip Conaghan from the University of Leeds. 'But every 1lb you lose results in a four-fold reduction in the load you put through the knee.' So losing even a small amount of weight can make a big difference to the strain put on your weight-bearing joints.

Feet 'Carrying excess weight can affect the way you walk – with feet wider apart and toes pointed outwards,' says Fran Campbell from The London Podiatry Centre. 'This lowers the foot arch, making the feet less stable, and can lead to problems like foot, knee, hip and lower-back pain. However, losing weight can improve symptoms in as little as 12 weeks.'

● This information is intended to provide general knowledge and should not be used to replace the advice given by your healthcare team.