

REPORTED CHANGES IN BODY WEIGHT AND EXERCISE  
AFTER PEOPLE GET MARRIED

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As part of a prospective study of food habits in newly married couples (Craig and Truswell 1985), questions were included about weight and exercise at interviews before marriage (interview B), after about 5 months of marriage (interview A1) and over 2 years after marriage (A2). Subjects were 60 couples (wives 20-33 years, husbands 21-37 years) who announced their engagement in the Sydney Morning Herald and who agreed to participate and who both completed all three interviews. Weights (light clothing or unclothed) and heights were reported, not measured.

At B, 36 of the wives had body mass index (BMI) in the "acceptable" range (20-25), 22 below and only two above, yet more than half those with acceptable BMI considered themselves slightly or definitely overweight and most of those with low BMIs thought their weight "just right". Thirteen of the husbands were overweight by BMI and 43 were in the 20-25 range. Twenty six of the latter considered their weight "just right" but six thought they were underweight and 10 that they were slightly overweight. Thus wives tended to see themselves as more overweight than their BMI while husbands' self assessments were closer to their BMIs.

Over the 3 year study weight change averaged +2 kg per person (range -17 to +20 kg). From B to A1, 23 wives gained and 10 lost weight; 20 husbands gained and nine lost weight. Between A1 and A2 26 wives gained and 13 lost weight; 29 husbands gained and 13 lost weight.

Vigorous exercise in husbands averaged 2-3 times per week before and 1-2 times per week after 2½ years of marriage. Wives exercise averaged 1-2 times per week before and once at A2. Exercise frequency decreased in 16 wives and 22 husbands between B and A1. It increased in only eight wives and 10 husbands and was unchanged in 36 wives and 28 husbands. Between A1 and A2 there was no overall change in exercise frequency.

In the 24 wives who considered themselves overweight the most frequent steps taken to reduce weight were to eat less of sweet foods (10), to eat less between meals (five) or to go on a diet (five). In the 21 overweight husbands 14 considered more exercise the best way to reduce weight. Only two of these wives and two husbands named eating less of fatty foods as a measure they would take to reduce weight.

There are social forces after marriage which may favour increased food consumption at the same time as individuals reduce their recreational exercise. It seems that there are neglected opportunities at this stage of life for some innovative health education.

CRAIG P.A. and TRUSWELL A.S. (1985). Food Technology in Australia 37 : 160.