



What does it cost to drop 30 pounds?

Getting smaller is big business. As you lose weight, your wallet could end up thinner, too -- sometimes by thousands of dollars, depending on which diet plan you pick.

By Bankrate.com

It could be a wedding, a high school reunion or a tropical vacation. We've all had that moment when an upcoming event makes us wish we could instantly drop 10, 20 or 30 pounds.

As panic sets in, ads featuring before and after shots of weight-loss success stories capture the imagination, and we muse: "If Mike Bullard lost 30 pounds in seven weeks, why can't I?"

Despite studies saying Americans are getting fatter every year, people are obsessed with weight loss, and the business of losing weight has ballooned into a \$30 billion-a-year industry in the U.S. How much would you be willing to spend to lose 30 pounds?

There's no shortage of options when it comes to weight-loss programs. The key is finding a program that fits your lifestyle and budget. Of course, you could always go the old-fashioned route, reducing calories and increasing exercise, but many dieters benefit from added structure and support, not to mention the accountability that accompanies an organized program. (There's nothing like a little peer pressure to keep you motivated.)

But paying someone to keep you on the straight and narrow isn't cheap. Remember, the phrase "caveat emptor" (let the buyer beware) was

practically coined for the diet industry. Do your homework, and remember that there are no shortcuts or magic shakes or bars that will be your ticket to Slimville.

Jenny Craig

The weight-loss brand marketed by celebrities including Queen Latifah, Valerie Bertinelli and Phylicia Rashad boasts a sensible approach to weight loss, advocating an average drop in body mass of about 1%, or 1 to 2 pounds per week. The program addresses mind-body aspects of weight loss by helping clients adopt healthful eating and exercise habits, as well as encouraging them to examine the underlying causes of their weight problems.

Jenny Rewards, priced at \$399 or \$359, is a 12-month program that rewards dieters' efforts and weight loss with discounts on food. There's also an at-home option that is similar except you also pay for shipping and have consultations by phone.

Sign-up costs include weekly one-on-one counseling, personalized menus, motivational plans and assorted manuals and guides, depending on membership level. Then, there's the cost of food. The prepackaged foods generally cost \$12 to \$18 per day, or \$84 to \$126 per week.

Cost of losing 30 pounds: \$399 or \$359 (if paid upfront), not including food.

NutriSystem

This at-home system (no office visits or weigh-ins) will appeal to those who don't like to cook. It involves eating the company's prepackaged meals exclusively. The 28-day program includes breakfast, lunch, dinner and snacks (you may add fresh vegetables, fruit and dairy). Support is offered through a free Web site.

"Some people lose 1 pound a week; some people lose 3 pounds a week," says a NutriSystem sales representative. If, on average, you lose 2 pounds a week, the diet will take about four months. It's cheaper to sign up for the Auto-Delivery Savings program (the food keeps coming until you cancel it), which costs \$299.95, including shipping, per month.

Cost of losing 30 pounds: \$1,199.80, including all food, except fresh fruits, vegetables and dairy.

Weight Watchers

This is one of the most popular diets in the world, probably because there's no such thing as taboo food. The diet is based on portion control and involves weekly support meetings. You can also do the program online.

The Flex plan means each food is assigned a point value, and you can eat anything as long as you stay within your allotted points. The Core plan involves a preapproved list of foods. Though there are plenty of Weight Watchers food items on the market, they are optional.

Registration is between \$15 and \$20, depending on location. Weekly meeting fees range from about \$10 to \$15, again, location-dependent. The standard monthly plan for Weight Watchers Online costs \$46.90 the first month and \$16.95 for subsequent months. Plan to lose 1 to 2 pounds per week for 20 weeks to reach a 30-pound weight-loss goal.

Cost of losing 30 pounds: \$214.80 to \$299.80, depending on location, or \$97.75 online, not including food.

The Zone Diet

This well-rounded plan is based on a 40-30-30 ratio of daily calories obtained from carbohydrates, proteins and favorable fats.

Though you could buy a book and follow the diet independently, why not do it like the stars? You could opt for the company's In the Zone Delivery. The service delivers a customized daily supply of food (three meals and two snacks) to subscribers in most metropolitan areas by 6 a.m. each day. Outside major cities, you can receive two to three days' worth of food at a time for a higher delivery fee.

The Canadian service came to the U.S. in 2007, starting with Los Angeles, and has since spread to the metropolitan areas of New York City, Boston, San Diego, New Jersey, South Florida, Connecticut, Philadelphia, San Francisco, Las Vegas and Washington, D.C.

Signing up for the 30-day "Chef Selected" plan will cost \$39.99 a day plus a shipping charge, which is \$3 for customers in most cities and \$10 for those in other areas. If you want to try it out for two weeks, you'll pay \$44.99 per day plus shipping. The average Zone dieter loses 8 to 10 pounds a month, and it will take three or four months to drop 30 pounds.

Cost of losing 30 pounds: \$3,869 to \$5,159, which includes \$3 a day for delivery.

Free advice

These diets are just the tip of the iceberg. The options for losing weight are endless.

Keep in mind that this article isn't an endorsement of any of the programs listed. Before committing to a particular plan, research the company, talk to your doctor and ask questions.

Some questions to ask before signing up:

- What are the costs for membership, weekly fees, food, supplements, maintenance and counseling?
- What's the payment schedule?
- Are any costs covered under health insurance?
- What is the refund policy?
- What are the health risks?
- How many participants succeed in reaching their goal and keeping the weight off?
- What kind of professional supervision or counseling is provided?

It's also important to be realistic. Ask yourself whether you can afford the program and whether it fits your lifestyle. If you have the motivation but not the means, don't fret. Instead, consider the age-old method for losing weight: Reduce the number of calories you take in while exercising to increase the amount you burn off.

This article was reported and written by Sheyna Steiner and Rose Raymond for Bankrate.com. Michelle Warren contributed to this article.