

I can get paid to lose weight?

Take a closer look at programs that give you cash to drop pounds.

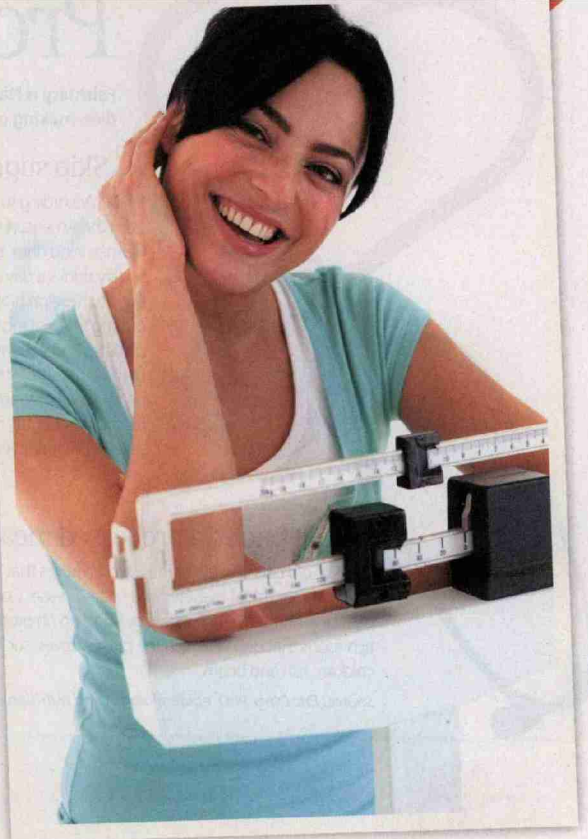
Search the Web and you'll turn up a host of sites, such as healthy wage.com and cash4pounds.com, that promise a monetary reward as an incentive to slim down. You can sign up for these sites as an individual or as part of a team. How you lose weight and earn money varies: On healthy wage.com, one way is to lower your BMI from 30 to 25 in a year; on cash4pounds.com, you win cash if you lose the highest percentage of weight in your sex and age group. A weigh-in with a doctor or trainer at the beginning and end of the program keeps you accountable. The catch? To profit, you have to pony up some of your own dough first. Before you sign up for any such program, ask yourself the following questions.

Is the program legit?

The site should be completely up-front, with all details, fees, terms and conditions spelled out clearly. The program should list a contact number for user questions—and a refund policy. Exactly how you can make money should be clear, too. On some sites, including healthywage.com, you bet on your projected weight loss (note that this could count as online gambling, which is illegal in some states). Lastly, read the fine print, and click on all the links on each page. Although a program's home page might look convincing, an in-depth look could be revealing.

How much will it really cost?

Many sites require participants to pay a hefty fee (as much as \$100) simply to join the program. And you might have to cover the weigh-ins at your doctor's office out-of-pocket.



Is this type of program right for me?

Online weight-loss systems don't provide as much personal support as a low-fee program with in-person meetings such as a supervised weight-loss contest at your gym or a group at a community center. Ask yourself what really helps you lose weight and keep it off.

Source: Linsey Knerl, consumer-awareness blogger for wisebread.com

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT: IAN LICHTON/SCIENCE PHOTO LIBRARY/CORBIS; MICHAEL ROSENFELD/GETTY IMAGES; DON PENNY, HAIR AND MAKEUP; ELIZABETH KAMP

