

Adult Obesity

Definition

Today, about 1 in 3 American adults are considered to be obese, but obesity is also becoming an increasing health problem globally. Obesity is defined as having an excessive amount of body fat. Obesity is more than just a cosmetic concern. It increases your risk of diseases and health problems such as diabetes, high blood pressure.

Body Mass Index

Doctors often use a formula based on your height and weight- called the body mass index (BMI)- to determine if you are obese. Adults with a BMI of 30 or higher are considered obese. Extreme obesity, also called severe obesity or morbid obesity, occurs when you have a BMI of 40 or more.

Causes

Although there are genetic and hormonal influences on body weight, the bottom line is that obesity occurs when you take in more calories than you burn through exercise and normal daily activities. Your body stores these excess calories as fat. Obesity usually results from a combination of causes and contributing factors, including:

- **Inactivity.** If you're not very active, you don't burn as many calories. Unfortunately, today most adults spend most of their day sitting, whether at home, at work or during leisure activities. With a sedentary lifestyle, you can easily take in more calories every day than you burn off through exercise or normal daily activities. Watching too much TV is one of the biggest contributors to a sedentary lifestyle and weight gain.
- **Unhealthy diet and eating habits.** Having a diet that is high in calories, eating fast food, skipping breakfast, eating most of your calories at night, consuming high calorie drinks and eating oversized portions all contribute to weight gain.
- **Lack of sleep.** Getting less than 7 hours of sleep a night can cause changes in hormones that increase your appetite. You may also crave foods high in calories and carbohydrates, which can contribute to weight gain.
- **Certain medications.** Some medications can lead to weight gain if you don't compensate through diet or activity. These medications include some antidepressants, anti-seizure medications, diabetes medications, anti-psychotic medications, steroids, and beta blockers.
- **Medical problems.** Obesity can sometimes be traced to a medical cause, such as Cushing's syndrome, polycystic ovary syndrome, and other diseases and medical conditions. Some medical conditions such as arthritis, can lead to decreased activity, which may result in weight gain.

Risk factors

Factors that increase your risk of obesity include:

- **Genetics.** Your genes may affect the amount of body fat you store and where that fat is distributed. Genetics also may play a role in how efficiently your body converts food into energy and how your body burns calories during exercise.
- **Family history.** Obesity tends to run in families. That's not just because of genetics. Family members tend to have similar eating, lifestyle and activity habits. If one or both of your parents are obese, your risk of being obese is increased.
- **Age.** Obesity can occur at any age, even in young children. But as you get older, hormonal changes and a less active lifestyle increase your risk of obesity. In addition, the amount of muscle in your body tends to decrease with age. This lower muscle mass leads to a decrease in metabolism. These changes also reduce calorie needs and can make it harder to keep off the excess weight. If you don't decrease your caloric intake as you age, you'll likely gain weight.
- **Quitting smoking.** Quitting smoking is often associated with weight gain. And for some, it can lead to a weight gain of several pounds a week for months, which can sometimes lead to obesity.
- **Social and economic issues.** Certain social and economic issues may be linked to obesity. You may not have been taught the healthy ways of cooking, or may not have the financial means to buy fresh fruits and vegetables or foods that aren't processed or packaged. In addition, some studies show that your social networks influence your weight- you're more likely to become obese if you have obese friends or relatives.

Even if you have one or more of these risk factors, it doesn't mean that you're destined to become obese. You can counteract most risk factors through diet, physical activity and exercise, and behavior changes.

Complications

If you're obese, you're more likely to develop a number of potentially serious health problems, including:

- Blood (fat) lipid abnormalities
- Cancer, including cancer of the uterus, cervix, breast, colon, rectum, and prostate
- Depression
- Gallbladder disease
- Heart disease
- High blood pressure
- Metabolic syndrome
- Nonalcoholic fatty liver disease
- Osteoarthritis
- Sleep apnea

- Stroke
- Type 2 diabetes

Quality of Life

When you're obese, your overall quality of life may be lower too. You may not be able to get around or to perform normal daily activities as well as you would like. You may have trouble participating in family activities. You may avoid public places. You may even encounter discrimination.

Other issues that may affect your quality of life include:

- Depression
- Disability
- Physical discomfort
- Sexual problems
- Shame
- Social isolation

What can I do?

Although you cannot change your genetic makeup and some of your other risk factors, you can work on changing your eating habits, level of physical activity, and other environmental factors.

- Learn to choose **sensible portions** of nutritious meals that are lower in fat.
- Learn to recognize and control environmental cues (like inviting smells or a package of cookies on the counter) that make you want to eat even if you are not hungry.
- Engage in at least 30 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity (like brisk walking) on most, preferably all, days of the week.
- Take a walk instead of watching TV.
- Eat meals and snacks at a table, not in front of the TV.
- Keep records of your food intake and physical activity.
- Eat healthy snacks
- Limit sweetened beverages
- Limit the number of times a week you eat out, especially to fast food restaurants.
- Slow down when eating. It is easier to detect how hungry or full you are when you eat slowly.
- Reduce the number of calories in your diet.

Fad diet and quick weight loss gimmicks have grown in popularity over the last several years. Yet, one thing that remains clear among most experts: A healthy diet combined with exercise is the key to losing weight and keeping it off. Talk with your doctor to find out how many calories you should have every day.

Remember to include plenty of fruits, vegetables and whole grain products. This is where most of your calories should come from. These low- fat foods provide vitamins, minerals, complex carbohydrates and other substances that are good for your health.

Your diet also should include:

- High in fiber
- Low in fat and cholesterol
- Low to moderate in sugars and sodium

Exercise

Exercise is an important part of any healthy weight loss plan. Try to include at least 30 minutes of moderate activity most days of the week. Walking, gardening, dancing, jogging, and swimming are all great ways to get moving.

There are many benefits to exercise. It reduces the risk of obesity, hypertension, and heart disease. It also increases longevity, and reduces feelings of anxiety, depression, and stress. With a regular exercise routine, most people see and feel results in about 4-6 weeks. Talk with your doctor before starting any weight loss routine.

CREATIVE Calorie Busters

You've heard it before. If you want to lose weight, you need to get off the couch. Don't lose heart if you're struggling with serious workouts, however. Shorter bursts of physical activity are powerful calorie fighters, too. Consider these simple ways to sneak extra movement into your day:

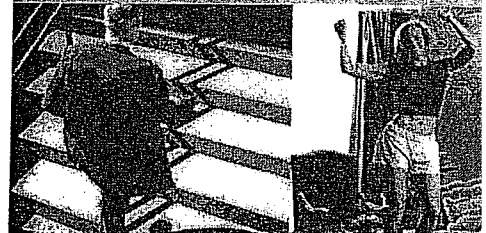
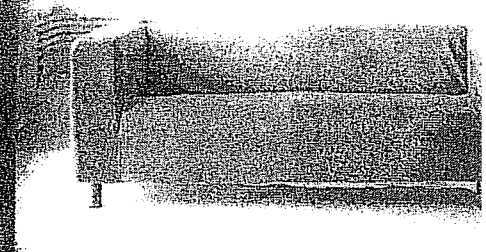
- Hide your remotes. Get up to turn the channel on your television or adjust the volume.
- Skip the commercials. Instead of flipping through the channels during commercials, climb the stairs a few times.
- When you're using a cell phone or cordless phone, walk from room to room while you're chatting. Or, do deep knee bends while you talk.
- When you're unpacking groceries, do a few bicep curls with unopened juice cans or cartons of milk.
- Hit the mall. Shopping online has its benefits, but doing your shopping the old-fashioned way is a great way to burn calories.
- When you're online, do a set of jumping jacks while you wait for slow pages to load.
- Do your own dirty work. Work up a sweat vacuuming, sweeping, waxing, and polishing your house.
- Skip the car wash. Haul out the hose and do the scrubbing yourself.
- Get personal. Instead of emailing your co-workers, walk to their desks to deliver messages.
- Store a few snacks in out-of-the-way places, such as the garage or basement. You'll burn a few calories tracking down something to eat.
- Lace up your walking shoes or hop on your bike for your next round of errands. If that's not practical, park your car at the end of the parking lot.
- If you take the bus, get off a stop or two early and walk to your destination.
- Walk to your mailbox.
- Turn up the stereo and dance.
- Be a kid again. Skip to the park and try out the monkey bars. Or, walk to the park and watch the "monkeys" on the bars.

Remember, there are many ways to burn calories. Talk to your doctor about an appropriate exercise plan. Be creative, and set your sights on an active lifestyle!

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If you want to lose weight, you need to **GET OFF THE COUCH**



Capital BlueCross

