



Adult Obesity Information for Members

What is Obesity?

Being obese means having so much body fat that your health is in danger. Having too much body fat can lead to many health problems. These include type 2 diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, arthritis, sleep apnea, and stroke. Because of these risks, it's important to lose weight even if you don't feel bad now. It's hard to change eating and exercise habits. But you can do it if you make a plan.

How Do You Know If You Are Obese?

You can use a measurement called a body mass index (BMI). This helps you understand whether your weight is dangerous to your health. The BMI combines your height and weight:

- If you have a BMI of 30 or higher, your extra weight is putting your health in danger.
- If you are Asian, your health may be at risk with a BMI of 27.5 or higher.

Where you carry your body fat may be as important as how many extra pounds you have. People who carry excess fat around the middle rather than the hips, are more likely to have health problems. The following guidelines help classify risk for disease:

- In women, a waist size of 35 in. (88 cm) or more
- In men, a waist size of 40 in. (101 cm) or more
- In Asian people, health problems are seen with a smaller waist size –
- In Asian women, a waist size of 32 in. (80 cm) or more
- In Asian men, a waist size of 36 in. (90 cm) or more

What Causes Obesity?

When you take in more calories than you burn off, you gain weight. How your body uses calories and whether you gain weight are affected by many things. Two major factors are how you eat and how active you are. If your family members are obese, you may have inherited a tendency to gain weight. Your family also helps form your eating and lifestyle habits. Those can lead to obesity. Also, our busy lives make it harder to plan and cook healthy meals. It's easier to use prepared foods, go out to eat, or go to the drive-through. But these foods are often high in fat and calories. Portions are often large. Work schedules, long commutes, and other commitments cut into the time we have for exercise. There is no quick fix to being overweight. To lose weight, you must burn more calories than you take in.

You've Tried Diets, But You Always Gain the Weight Back. What Can You Do?

Focus on health, not diets. Diets are hard to maintain and usually do not work in the long run. It is very hard to stay with a diet that includes lots of big changes in your eating habits. Instead of a diet, focus on lifestyle changes. These will improve your health and achieve the right balance of energy and calories. To lose weight, you need to burn more calories than you take in. You can do it by eating healthy foods in reasonable amounts and becoming more active. And you need

to do it every day. Little steps mean a lot. Losing just 10 lb. (4.5 kg) can improve your health.

Make a plan for change. Work with your doctor to develop a plan to lose weight that will work for you. Ask family members and friends for help in staying with it. Ask your doctor to recommend a dietitian to help you with meal planning. When you stray from your plan, don't get upset. Figure out what got you off track and how you can fix it, and then return to your plan.

How can you stay on your plan for change?

It is hard to change habits. You have to be ready. Make sure this is the right time for you. Are you ready to make a plan and stay on it? Do you have the support of your family and friends? Do you know what your first steps will be? Becoming healthier and staying that way is a lifelong effort. Most people have more success when they make small changes, one step at a time. Try these simple strategies to get started:

- Eat an extra piece of fruit.
- Walk 10 minutes more.
- Add more vegetables to your meals.

Studies show that people who keep track of what they eat are better at losing weight. Keep a notebook. Write down everything you eat and drink each day. You may be surprised to see how much you are eating. Use a calorie counter to add up your calories. (You can find calorie counters online and at bookstores.) This will help you see patterns that you may want to change. As you keep track of calories, look at things like:

- whether you skip meals
- times of day you eat
- how often you eat out
- how many fruits and vegetables you eat

You may want to write down the amount of physical activity you've had each day. Compare the calories you burned to those you took in.

Can You Take Medications or Have Surgery?

Surgery and medicines do not work by themselves. Most people also need to make changes in what they eat and how active they are. Before your doctor will prescribe medicines or surgery, he or she will probably want you to work on diet and activity for at least 6 months. Even if your doctor gives you medicines or recommends surgery, you will need to keep your new healthy habits for the rest of your life.

Should I Have Surgery for Obesity?

Have you already tried lifestyle changes and medicines to help you lose weight? Surgery may be an option. However, all weight loss surgeries have risks. It's important for you and your health care provider to talk. Discuss the risks and benefits and get help deciding what's best in your case. Consider the following when making your decision:

- Guidelines vary but surgery is generally an option when your BMI is 40 or higher. You should also have a life-threatening or disabling condition related to your weight. The following conditions may also be required, or are at least considered:
 - You have been obese for at least 5 years
 - You do not abuse alcohol
 - You do not have untreated depression or another major psychiatric disorder
 - You are between 18 and 65 years of age
- Depending on the type of surgery, most people lose 30% to 80% of their excess weight. That is weight greater than what is considered healthy.

- Some of the weight lost may be regained.
- Some types of surgery may put you at risk for nutritional deficiencies.
- People who are obese have a higher risk of complications from surgery.

References

Healthwise, Incorporated. Obesity. Author: Caroline Rea, RN, BS, MS. Medical Review: Caroline D. Rhoads, MD (Internal Medicine), Matthew I. Kim, MD (Endocrinology and Metabolism). April 20, 2007.

Healthwise, Incorporated. Should I Have Surgery for Obesity? Author: Caroline Rea, RN, BS, MS. Medical Review: Caroline D. Rhoads, MD (Internal Medicine), Matthew I. Kim, MD (Endocrinology and Metabolism). April 20, 2007.

Legal Disclaimer: Preventive health guidelines are based on information and recommendations of independent third parties available before printing. These guidelines are not a replacement for your doctor's medical advice. Your doctor may have more up to date information. Members should always talk with their doctor(s) about what care and treatment is right for them. The fact that a service or item is in these guidelines is not a guarantee of coverage or payment. Members should look at their own plan coverage papers to see what is or is not a covered benefit. WellCare does not offer medical advice or provide medical care, and does not guarantee any results or outcomes. WellCare does not warrant or guarantee, and shall not be liable for any information that is in these guidelines or that is not in these guidelines or for any recommendations made by independent third parties from whom any of the information was obtained.

Version: 3/2009, 7/2010