

# WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT OBESITY

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## What Is Obesity?

Obesity is a chronic medical condition where you have more body fat than is healthy. Too much body fat can cause serious health problems, including diabetes, heart disease, and sleep apnea, and can even shorten your life. Hormonal changes occur when one loses weight, making it harder to lose additional weight and keep it off. Many factors play a role in how much you weigh, including your family history; foods you eat; how active you are; your sleep habits; taking certain medicines; and other health problems.

## How Is It Diagnosed?

Your doctor or other health care clinician will ask you about your health and weight history. This may include questions about your eating habits, activity level, previous weight loss attempts and how your weight has changed, sleep patterns, medications, and causes of stress in your life.

Your provider will measure your weight and height to calculate your body mass index (BMI). In general, if your BMI is between 25 and 29.9, you will be diagnosed as having overweight; if it is greater than 30, you will be diagnosed as having obesity. Your doctor may also measure your waist circumference. Persons of Asian descent may be diagnosed with overweight and obesity at lower levels of BMI because of differences in weight distribution and weight-related health risk.

You will have a physical examination and simple blood tests may be done.

## How Is It Treated?

Your doctor will talk to you about how you can lose weight and review your medications to see whether they might be causing weight gain.

They may also rule out other treatable causes of obesity.

Even a small amount of weight loss (5%–10%) can improve your health and lower your risk for complications, such as diabetes. Together, you and your doctor will agree on a weight loss goal and a plan that is right for you. Some strategies include:

- Eating less calories but eating plenty of fruits and vegetables.
- Limiting red meats, processed foods (chips, cookies, sugary cereals), and sugar-sweetened beverages like soda and juice.
- Eating out less often.
- Slowly increasing physical, working up to 150 minutes per week (about 30 minutes per day most days of the

week). Include muscle-strengthening activities at least 2 days per week.

- Finding a support network. There are many online and in-person weight loss groups. There are also free smartphone apps for weight loss.
- Making sure to get more than 6 hours of sleep each night (ideally 8 hours).
- For some, your doctor may recommend a weight loss medication or weight loss surgery.

## What Eating Plan Is Best for Long-Term Weight Loss?

Research shows that there is not much difference in long-term weight loss among different eating plans, although some eating plans may lead to health benefits in addition to weight loss. The most important thing is finding a plan that is easy for you to stick with in the long-term. Many popular diets are similar in recommending lean proteins, vegetables and fruits, and some healthy fats (nuts, avocados) while limiting refined carbohydrates (sugar, most breads, white rice, and most snack foods). Alternative eating plans such as meal-replacement diets and intermittent fasting also may help with weight loss.

## Will I Need Medicine or Surgery to Lose Weight?

If you are not able to lose enough weight through diet and exercise alone, your doctor may talk to you about medication options. For long-term health, these medications will need to be continued over the long term as weight will usually be regained if you stop the medication. If you have severe obesity and have other health problems because of it, surgery may be an option. Both medicine and surgery lower the amount of food your body can take in and help you eat less.

## Questions for My Doctor

- How much weight should I lose?
- How many calories should I eat to lose weight?
- How can I become more active?
- Where can I find weight loss support?
- I can't seem to stop eating. What should I do?
- Are any of the medicines I take causing me to gain weight? Are there alternatives?
- Should I consider taking medicine to help me lose weight?
- Should I consider weight loss surgery?

## For More Information



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### MedlinePlus

<https://medlineplus.gov/obesity.html>

### American College of Physicians

[www.acponline.org/clinical-information/clinical-resources-products/obesity-management-learning-hub#patient-education](http://www.acponline.org/clinical-information/clinical-resources-products/obesity-management-learning-hub#patient-education)