

# Obesity: What You Need to Know

**Obesity is a disease in which a person has an excess amount of body fat. Learn about obesity, including its causes and signs, and how to keep a healthy weight.**

## WHAT IS OBESITY?

**Obesity** is disease in which a person has an excess amount of body fat. Research has shown that extra fat in the body produces several chemicals that can cause serious diseases. This can include diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, liver problems and a condition called polycystic ovary syndrome in females (where females make higher than typical amounts of male hormones).

## HOW COMMON IS OBESITY?

Obesity is one of the most common chronic (long-term) diseases that affects all ages. One out of every 3 children ages 10-17 years has overweight or obesity.

## WHAT CAUSES WEIGHT GAIN?

Everyone has a set target for how much fat their body needs – called the **fat mass goal**. The fat mass goal is determined by a variety of factors like genetics, age, race/ethnicity and the environment. This fat mass goal changes to a higher level in some situations, like after eating a high fat diet for a long time or due to some medications.

## HOW CAN I KEEP A HEALTHY WEIGHT?

Five important strategies can be used to maintain a healthy weight. This includes:

- **Regular physical activity.** Find a type of physical activity that you enjoy. This can include walking, dancing, playing a sport, riding a bike or doing a workout. Physical activity can be planned or unplanned. Regular physical activity is very important for your overall health and wellbeing. The amount of physical activity you need depends on your age. Most adults need at least 2 hours and 30 minutes (150 minutes) of moderate intensity aerobic activity every week. This means physical activity that gets your heart rate up and makes you breathe a little harder. They also need muscle strengthening exercises 2 or more days a week that work all major muscle groups (legs, arms, back and abdomen, or belly area).
- **A diet full of fruits, vegetables, whole grains and lean protein.** Learn healthy eating habits. Include colorful, fiber-filled and nutrient-rich foods in your diet, such as fruits and vegetables and whole grains. Cook healthy meals at home. Enjoy going out to eat as an occasional treat. Limit or avoid processed or prepackaged foods when possible.
- **Ways to relieve stress.** Learn ways to relieve stress. Your care team can help you learn different skills and ways to release and cope with stress in your daily life.

***More strategies and information on the back! >>>***

- **Good sleep patterns.** Make sure to get enough sleep every night. For most teens and young adults, this is 8-10 hours of sleep every night.
- **Reducing screen time** (time spent watching TV, playing video games or games on the computer or phone and other time spent on the computer, tablet or smartphone). This should be less than 2 hours a day.

## HOW CAN I LOSE WEIGHT?

Weight loss is different for everyone. An important step for successful weight loss is to find what caused you to gain weight. For example, diet changes might work well for one person while improving sleep habits might work better for someone else. Your care team can help figure out what might have caused you to gain weight.

Depending on your needs and goals, different medical or surgical treatments can help you lose weight. If you have questions about medical or surgical treatments for weight loss, ask your care team.

## WHAT ARE THE HEALTH RISKS OF OBESITY?

There are many health risks of obesity, including:

- Type 2 diabetes (a disease that affects your blood sugar level)
- High cholesterol levels (high cholesterol raises your risk of heart disease)
- High blood pressure
- Gallstones (hard, pebble-like pieces of material usually made of cholesterol)
- Fatty liver disease (build-up of fat in and around the liver.)
- Pancreatitis (inflammation of the pancreas, an organ behind the stomach that makes enzymes to help with digestion and hormones that regulate blood sugar)

## HEALTH RISKS OF OBESITY (CONTINUED)

- Obstructive sleep apnea (a condition that affects how a person breathes while sleeping)
- Reproductive dysfunction (problems with fertility or the ability to have children)
- Stress incontinence (urinary accident when the person coughs, sneezes or strains)
- Increased pressure in your brain, which leads to headaches (also called idiopathic intracranial hypertension)
- Joint problems
- Vertebral disc disease (a condition in which the discs between the joints in the spine break down and weaken. This causes pain the back, neck, arms or legs.)
- Higher risk of certain cancers, especially breast or colon cancer

## HOW DO DOCTORS TREAT OBESITY?

Treatment ranges from lifestyle changes to medical and surgical options.

Lifestyle modifications can include:

- Learning healthier habits around eating and food choices
- Adding physical activity to your daily life
- Keeping a consistent sleep schedule
- Reducing screen time

Your care team can help you learn how to make these changes in your life, so they fit in your time and your budget. The care team can also help with motivation and setting goals, so you can reach your weight and health goals. If the care team thinks making lifestyle changes alone is not enough, they can refer you to a center where medications and surgery for weight loss is offered.

## Pediatric Endocrinology and Diabetes Center

Mass General Hospital for Children  
55 Fruit Street, Suite 6C  
Boston, MA 02114

[www.massgeneralforchildren.org](http://www.massgeneralforchildren.org)

For more information please call

**617-726-2909**

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