



Adult Obesity Information for Staywell 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 type 2 diabetes, heart disease and high blood pressure. It can also lead to arthritis, sleep apnea and stroke. Because of these risks, it is important to lose weight even if you do not feel bad now. It is hard to change eating habits 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 the body mass index, or BMI. It will tell you if your weight is a risk to your health. The BMI is a number based on your height and weight. If you have a BMI of 30 or higher, your extra weight is putting your health at risk. 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 too much fat around the middle, rather than around the hips, are more likely to have health problems. In women, a waist size of 35 inches or more raises the chance for disease. In men, a waist size of 40 inches or more raises the chance for disease. In Asian people, health problems are seen with a smaller waist size. In Asian women, a waist size of 32 inches or more raises the chance for disease. In Asian men, a waist size of 36 inches or more raises the chance for disease.

What Causes Obesity?

When you take in more calories than you burn off, you gain weight. How you eat, how active you are and other things affect how your body uses calories. This can affect whether you gain weight. If your family members are obese, you may be more likely to gain weight. Your family also helps form your eating and lifestyle habits. These can lead to obesity. Also, our busy lives make it harder to plan and cook healthy meals. For many of us, it's easier to use prepared foods, go out to eat or go to a drive thru. But these foods are often high in fat and calories. Portions are often large. Work schedules, long commutes and other factors cut into the time we have for physical activity. 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 stick to and usually do not work in the long run. It is very hard to stay with a diet that makes big changes in your eating habits. Instead of a diet, focus on lifestyle changes that will improve your health and give you 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 pounds 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 keeping with your plan. Ask your doctor to recommend a dietitian to help you with meal planning. When you stray from your plan, do not get upset. Figure out what got you off track and how you can fix it. 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. For example, you might eat an extra piece of fruit, walk 10 minutes more or 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 where you can 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.) As you keep track of calories, look at

whether you skip meals, when you eat, how often you eat out and how many fruits and vegetables you eat. This will help you see patterns that you may want to change. You may want to write down the amount of physical activity you've had each day and compare the calories you burned to those you took in.

Can You Take Medications or Have Surgery?

Surgery and drugs do not work by themselves. Most people also need to change what they eat and how active they are. Your doctor may approve drugs or surgery. But first, he or she will probably want you to work on diet and activity for at least 6 months. Even if your doctor gives you medicine or approves surgery, you will need to keep your new healthy habits for the rest of your life.

Should I Have Surgery for Obesity?

Sometimes lifestyle changes and taking drugs do not help an obese person lose enough weight. In that case, surgery may be an option. But all weight loss surgeries have risks. It is important for you and your doctor to discuss the risks and benefits. Then you can decide what is best for your situation.

Here are some things to think about when making your decision:

- Guidelines vary, but surgery is usually an option when your BMI is 40 or higher and you also have a condition related to your weight that threatens your life or could disable you.

There are other conditions that may be required, or 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 mental health problem.
- You are between 18 and 65 years old.

Depending on the type of surgery, most people lose from about 30 to 80 percent of their excess weight. Some of the weight lost may be gained back. Some types of surgery may put you at risk for low nutrition. People who are obese have a higher risk of problems 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.

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