

# Obesity: What It Is and How to Treat It

Obesity is a complex, chronic medical condition caused by factors such as genetics, environment, and behavior. Obesity can affect your mental wellbeing and increases your risk for other conditions, such as type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, cholesterol problems, trouble sleeping, and joint pain. Treating obesity will help prevent or delay these other conditions.

## Factors that may lead to obesity include:

- **Genetics:** The genes passed on to you at birth affect how your body stores extra energy as body fat.
- **Eating habits:** Eating more calories than you use each day—the extra energy is stored as body fat.
- **Physical activity:** If you're not active, your body will not use as much energy as it gets from foods. The unused energy is stored as body fat.
- **Sleep habits:** Studies show that not getting enough sleep can increase your risk of obesity. Aim for seven to nine hours of sleep each night.
- **Stress:** Stress can affect hormones in a way that leads to hunger and makes you crave foods high in fat and sugar, which have extra calories.
- **Hormonal and biological factors:**
  - An imbalance in certain hormones, like insulin, can affect appetite and energy use.
  - Gut health affects how your body digests and processes food and can also cause you to gain weight.
  - Certain diseases such as hypothyroidism, PCOS (polycystic ovary syndrome), and Cushing's syndrome can lead to weight gain.
  - Some medications, such as anti-depressants and antipsychotics, promote weight gain.

## Diagnosis of Obesity

BMI is the most easy and practical way of diagnosing obesity.

However, it shouldn't be the only tool used. These are the BMI measurements that indicate your weight status:

**BMI <18.5 kg/m<sup>2</sup>:  
Underweight**

**BMI 18.5-24.9 kg/m<sup>2</sup>:  
Normal / Healthy Weight**

**BMI 25-29.9 kg/m<sup>2</sup>:  
Overweight**

**BMI 30-34.9 kg/m<sup>2</sup>:  
Class 1 obesity**

**BMI 35-39.9 kg/m<sup>2</sup>:  
Class 2 obesity**

**BMI 40 kg/m<sup>2</sup> and above:  
Class 3 obesity**

Other tests used to diagnose obesity include waist circumference, waist-to-height ratios, and body composition analyses. These tests should be used along with BMI for diagnosis.

## Your Treatment Plan

### Lifestyle Changes

Lifestyle changes, such as healthy eating and physical activity, are the first steps of your weight-wellness journey.

You can start by making simple changes, such as lowering the amount of processed foods and sugary drinks you have each day. Making these changes and others along with your healthy eating plan will help you feel your best, and without giving up the foods you enjoy to make it happen!

### Nutrition

Ask your doctor to refer you to a registered dietitian (RDN) who will partner with you to create an eating plan that helps you reach your health goals. It will include the portion sizes and balance of vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and lean protein that is tailored to your unique needs. They will create a plan with the foods you enjoy, your weight, gender, and activity level in mind.



### Physical Activity

Another lifestyle change you can start with to treat obesity is physical activity. It will help to give you more energy, make you feel better, and manage many chronic conditions, including diabetes.

Talk with your doctor about what activities will work for your treatment plan and the milestones to set to help you reach your health goals. Your plan will include a mix of aerobic exercise, strength training, balance, and flexibility. The best way to stay active is by doing things you enjoy, such as dancing, swimming, or walking with friends. Over time as you reach your goals for being active during the day, you'll be able to increase how intense



## Medications

Several medications have been approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to treat obesity. These medications will be prescribed by your doctor after a review of your medical history, the medications you're taking, and your other medical conditions. Your doctor should explain how the medication works and its side effects. Plan to have close follow-up visits with your doctor to talk about how the medication is working and any side effects it's causing.

## Surgery

Your doctor can refer you for surgery if it's right for your treatment plan. These types of surgeries can lead to significant weight loss and improve your risk for or ability to manage other conditions.

## The Takeaway

Obesity is a chronic medical condition that can be treated with a combination of lifestyle changes, medication, and surgery. Schedule an obesity-focused visit with your doctor to find out if you have obesity and to develop a treatment plan that meets your needs. Remember, when you treat obesity, you are also helping to prevent or manage several other related conditions, such as diabetes and high blood pressure.

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