



Obesity Fact Sheet

What is obesity?

Obesity is a chronic, complex disease characterized by excess or abnormal body fat that can impair health. While Body Mass Index (BMI) is one tool that may help identify obesity, it does not fully reflect a person's overall health or the complexity of the condition. Obesity is influenced by a combination of biological, genetic, environmental, social, and psychological factors — not simply willpower or personal choice.



What does it mean that obesity is a chronic illness?

When health care providers say obesity is a chronic disease it means that managing weight is a lifelong process. While short term “quick-fix” solutions sound appealing, long term solutions that a person is comfortable with and can sustain will have the biggest impact in quality of life and health. Work with your health provider to determine your Best Weight.

Who is at risk for obesity?



If you already live with overweight you are at greater risk of developing obesity. Certain life stages are associated with excess weight gain because they can shift the body's regulatory system. Puberty, pregnancy, post-partum and menopause for women and the late twenties for men are examples. Other risk factors include family predisposition (genetics) as well as psychological issues (e.g. depression, emotional eating, etc.), lack of sleep (e.g. shift work), decreased physical activity (e.g. sedentary work) or medications (e.g. psychiatric or diabetes medications).

What does mood have to do with my weight?

Mood disorders including depression and anxiety can contribute to weight gain by affecting your appetite, metabolism and energy levels. This can interfere with your ability to lose or manage your weight. In addition, poorly managed stress can further contribute weight gain. Identifying and treating any mood contributors is often the first step to successfully managing your weight.

What does sleep have to do with my weight?

Sleep deprivation has been linked to obesity. Lack of sleep or poor sleep affects hormones that regulate your hunger and satiety setting you up to eat more. Sleep deprivation can also interfere with your ability to be active and makes it more difficult to deal with stress.



How does activity affect my weight?

Physical activity helps to regulate your emotional state and stimulates pleasure hormones that will make you feel good. Physical activity also has many benefits to your body including increasing overall fitness, lowering blood pressure, increasing endurance and increasing muscle mass. All of these can reduce hunger, increase mood, increase calorie expenditure, and help create healthy lifestyle. Best of all there are different types and levels of activity for all body types!

What other factors can affect my weight?

Reward hunger is a sign your brain is overwhelmed or stressed. In this state your brain sees food as a way to cope and it is susceptible to impulse and immediate gratification. Tackling these impulses and finding non-food ways to activate your reward pathways can help.



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