

Genetics or Lifestyle?

Around one third of the United States population is obese. Obesity is the most common health problem doctors encounter, and its effects are not minor. Being obese shortens your life expectancy by several years, and it leads to a long list of serious diseases, many of which are life-threatening. While obesity is a major cause of death in the U.S., the tragedy is that it is preventable. With common sense, motivation, and some hard work, you can put obesity behind you for good.

Definition

Obesity is having an excessive amount of body fat. The most common method of measuring body fat is a calculation of your body mass index (BMI). BMI is calculated using a formula that takes into account both weight and height.

A person is considered medically obese when their BMI is above 30. A BMI of 40 or more puts you in the highest category of obesity. A BMI between 25 and 30 is classified as "overweight," while an ideal BMI is between 18.5 and 25.

A BMI of 30 is the point at which extra weight shortens life expectancy and increases the risk for other diseases. If you find that yours is above 30, it should be a wake-up call that your weight is putting you in more danger than you thought.

Causes

Obesity is a complex disease. The most common causes include: eating and physical activity patterns, insufficient sleep, genetics, certain illnesses and medications. There are a few cases in which genetics and medications contribute to dramatic weight gain, and by far, the most common cause is lifestyle. An unhealthy diet that is high in fat and sugar is usually the first step towards obesity. Lack of exercise is the other major component. As more jobs become computer-based, sitting at a desk all day is now far more common than it used to be. If we don't make a conscious effort to burn calories and limit the number of calories we consume each day, obesity will occur.

LEARN MORE

Make smart decisions about your health and visit a physician or health specialist for advice and questions.

CDC's Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity

www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpao

FDA Dietary Supplements Warnings

www.fda.gov/Food/DietarySupplements

OBESITY & YOUR HEALTH



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HEALTHY DIRECTIONS

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HEALTHY DIRECTIONS

Health Effects

Obesity dramatically increases the body's risk of developing many serious diseases. They include:

Heart Trouble/High Cholesterol

A body with too much stored fat puts a heavy strain on the heart as it tries to pump blood. This strain leads to a high risk of heart failure, possibly even at a young age. High cholesterol makes matters even worse, blocking arteries and creating the possibility of heart attack and stroke.

Diabetes

Overweight and obese people are more vulnerable than others to diabetes, a disease that requires daily attention, particularly to sugar levels, and greatly restricts your lifestyle.

Respiratory Illness

Extra weight often interferes with the respiratory tract. This interference can lead to asthma and other painful, life-threatening respiratory diseases.



Muscular/Skeletal Damage

The skeletal and muscular systems are not capable of supporting excessive weight over the course of a lifetime without suffering damage. In later years, you could find yourself confined to a wheelchair and greatly limited in your ability to enjoy life.

It is extremely common for obese people to suffer from back pain. The only cure is losing enough weight to relieve the constant pressure on the backbone.

Gastrointestinal Problems

Overeating slows the stomach's ability to process nutrients and eliminate body waste. Wear and tear damage can affect the body's gastrointestinal system. Obesity can cause acid reflux disease (heartburn) where stomach acid burns the lining of the esophagus.

Why Change?

Make no mistake: tackling the problem of obesity head-on is a big project, and it requires a long-term commitment to change your lifestyle permanently. But the benefits far outweigh the work that it takes to lose weight.

Self-esteem

When we are obese, it is hard for us to feel good about ourselves and have confidence in our social and professional lives. Making the effort to reverse obesity, on the other hand, creates an incredible sense of achievement and boosts self-esteem. Every time you look in the mirror, you will see someone who took charge of his or her own health and turned it around.

Higher Quality of Life

How do you feel when you get out of bed in the morning? If you don't feel excited about taking on the day ahead of you, you don't know what you're missing. Obesity makes even the simple tasks of life difficult, not to mention outdoor activities and hobbies. As you lose weight and feel better by the day, you will find yourself looking for opportunities to exert yourself and find out just what you're capable of. Take it from countless others who have made the same journey: you'll never want to go back to feeling the way you did when you were overweight.

No Quick Fix

Many people who are impatient to get to the end of the weight-loss road sign up for radical diets, hyped-up new medical products, or surgery to shed pounds. If it sounds too good to be true, it is. Many get-fit-quick schemes provide immediate results, but they do so by sidestepping the root causes of obesity: poor diet and lack of exercise. As soon as you end your grapefruit-only diet or leave the surgical clinic, your old habits will begin adding the pounds back on.

Great Tips to Beat Obesity

- **Portion control**
By eating from smaller plates you can cut how much you eat. Try eating off of a 10-inch plate instead of a 12-inch one and you can cut your calorie intake by as much as 22%.
- **Get out of your comfort zone**
When you live in constant climate-controlled comfort, your body doesn't have to work as hard to maintain its internal temperature. By keeping your home colder in the winter and warmer in the summer, you may force your body to burn more calories.
- **Eat whole foods**
Choosing whole foods like oats, apples, brown rice, and broccoli is a smart move for managing weight. These foods are packed with essential nutrients and help keep you full, making it easier to control calorie intake.



Fighting Obesity

The slower, steadier, and healthier way to fight obesity is to permanently change the way you eat and exercise. Altering your diet is difficult at first, but gets easier. By making small, gradual changes and exercising patience with yourself, you can teach your body to crave the right kinds of foods. Adding exercise to your life takes the same discipline. Don't try to do too much too fast—it's surprisingly easy to injure yourself, especially if you have not done much exercising in the past. But as you reduce your caloric intake and increase your calories burned during the day through exercise, weight loss is inevitable. Obesity will disappear from your life, and you'll discover the healthy you that is hiding inside.

Obesity dramatically increases the body's risk of developing many diseases.

