

# Understanding Obesity

An educational resource provided  
by the Obesity Action Coalition



## What is obesity?

Obesity is a disease characterized by excessive body fat. People who are medically obese usually are affected by behavior, genetic and environmental factors that are difficult to control with dieting. Obesity increases the likelihood of certain diseases and other related health problems.



## Who is affected?

Obesity is a serious health epidemic that affects one in three Americans. It is estimated that more than 93 million Americans are obese, with that number predicted to climb to 120 million in the next five years.

## What is the difference between overweight and obese?

Stages of overweight are medically defined by body mass index (BMI). An individual with a BMI of 25 to 29.9 is clinically classified as overweight. A BMI of 30 or more is classified as obese. To determine your BMI, please view the BMI chart in the back of this brochure or visit [www.obesityaction.org](http://www.obesityaction.org).

Overweight individuals are also at risk for developing health problems, such as

heart disease, stroke, diabetes, certain types of cancer, gout (joint pain caused by excess uric acid) and gallbladder disease. Being overweight can also cause problems such as sleep apnea (interrupted breathing during sleep) and osteoarthritis (wearing away of the joints).

Weight-loss can help improve the harmful effects of being overweight. However, many overweight people have difficulty reaching their healthy body weight.

## Body Mass Index (BMI)

BMI is a number calculated by dividing a person's weight in kilograms by his or her height in meters squared. BMI is used in determining obesity.

Obesity is most commonly calculated using BMI. An adult with a BMI of 30 or greater is clinically obese. To determine your BMI, please view the BMI chart in the back of this brochure or visit **[www.obesityaction.org](http://www.obesityaction.org)**.

BMI is not used to determine a person's actual percentage of body fat, but it is a good indicator to categorize weight in terms of what is healthy and unhealthy.

## What are the health risks associated with obesity?

There are more than 30 medical conditions that are associated with obesity. Individuals who are obese are at risk of developing one or more of these serious medical conditions, causing poor health or, in severe cases, early death. In fact, more than 112,000 annual deaths are attributable to obesity. The most prevalent obesity-related diseases include:

- Diabetes
- High blood pressure
- High cholesterol
- Heart disease
- Stroke
- Gallbladder disease
- Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease (GERD)
- Osteoarthritis
- Sleep apnea and respiratory problems
- Some cancers

## What causes obesity?

Obesity is due to an individual taking in more calories than they burn over an extended period of time. These "extra" calories are stored as fat. Although there are several factors that can lead to this energy imbalance in obese individuals, the main contributors are behavior, environment and genetics.

## **Behavior**

In today's fast-paced environment, it is easy to adopt unhealthy behaviors. Behavior, in the case of obesity, relates to food choices, amount of physical activity you get and the effort to maintain your health. Based on food choices, many people now select diets that are calorie-rich, but nutrient-poor. This behavioral problem also relates to the increase in portion sizes at home and when dining out.

## **Environment**

Environment plays a key role in shaping an individual's habits and lifestyle. There are many environmental influences that can impact your health decisions. Today's society has developed a more sedentary lifestyle. Walking has been replaced by driving cars, basic physical activity has been replaced by technology and nutrition has been overcome by convenience foods.

## **Genetics**

Science shows that genetics play a role in obesity. Genes can cause certain disorders which result in obesity. However, not all individuals who are predisposed to obesity become obese. Research is currently underway to determine which genes contribute most to obesity.

*What are the social effects of obesity?*

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Individuals affected by obesity often face obstacles far beyond health risks. Emotional suffering may be one of the most painful

parts of obesity. Society often emphasizes the importance of physical appearance. As a result, people who are obese often face prejudice or discrimination in the job market, at school and in social situations.

### **Effects at Work**

Due to the negative stigma associated with obesity, obese employees are often viewed as less competent, lazy and lacking in self-discipline by their co-workers and employers. Often times, discriminatory attitudes can negatively impact wages, promotions and employment status for obese employees.

Finding a job can also be a difficult task for an obese individual. Studies show that obese applicants are less likely to be hired than thinner applicants, despite having identical job qualifications. Recently, the frequency of legal cases involving the firing of obese employees because of their weight, even though they are able to perform their job duties, has also increased.

### **Effects at School**

Educational settings also provide the possibility for discriminatory situations. Obese children face numerous obstacles, ranging from harassment, teasing and rejection from peers, to biased attitudes from teachers.

At a young age, children are exposed to obesity's negative stigma. Obese children are sometimes characterized as being unhappy, lazy, mean and not having many friends.

## **In Healthcare Settings**

Negative attitudes about obese patients also exist in the healthcare setting. Obese patients are often reluctant to seek medical care, may be more likely to delay important preventative healthcare services and more frequently cancel medical appointments. Delaying medical attention can lead to delayed discovery or treatment of comorbid conditions, such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease, while becoming more physically damaging.

The consequences of this discrimination can seriously impact an individual's quality of life and only further intensify the negative stigma associated with obesity.

*What treatments are available for obesity?*



Obesity treatment strategies vary from person to person. Beginning treatment early is an essential part of success, and it is important to talk with your physician before beginning any weight-loss program. There are several methods for treating obesity, such as behavior modification, physical activity, non clinical weight management programs, medically managed weight-loss and surgical treatment.

## **Behavior Modification**

Behavior plays a significant role in obesity. Modifying behaviors that have contributed to developing obesity is one way to treat

the disease either alone or in conjunction with other treatments. A few suggested behavior modifiers include: changing eating habits, increasing physical activity, becoming educated about the body and how to nourish it appropriately, engaging in a support group or extracurricular activity and setting realistic weight management goals.

### **Physical Activity**

Increasing or initiating a physical activity program is an important aspect in managing obesity. Today's society has developed a very sedentary lifestyle and routine physical activity can greatly impact your health. Set realistic goals and make sure to consult with your physician before initiating any exercise program.

### **Non Clinical Weight Management Programs**

Participating in non clinical programs is another form of treatment for obesity. Some programs may be commercially operated, such as a privately owned weight-loss chain. Counselors, books, Web sites or support groups are all ways you can be involved in a non clinical weight-loss program.

### **Medically Managed Weight-Loss**

Medically managed weight-loss programs provide treatment in a clinical setting with a licensed healthcare professional, such as a medical doctor, nurse, registered dietitian and/or psychologist. These programs typically offer services such as prescription of weight-loss medications, nutrition education, physical activity instruction and behavioral therapy.

## **Surgical Treatment**

Surgical treatment of obesity is an option for those who are classified as morbidly obese. Morbid obesity is defined as a patient having a BMI of 40 or greater, or weighing more than 100 pounds over their ideal body weight. In addition, a patient with a BMI of 35 or greater with one or more obesity-related diseases is also classified as morbidly obese. After weight-loss surgery, individuals must still modify their lifestyle habits, adjust their diet and increase their physical activity.

There are a few different types of bariatric-surgery or weight-loss surgery treatment options, such as Roux-En-Y Gastric Bypass, Biliopancreatic Diversion with Duodenal Switch and Laparoscopic Adjustable Gastric Banding.

*What can you do to learn more about obesity?*



The OAC is the only obesity individual-focused nonprofit organization dedicated to helping those affected and giving them a voice. We offer many valuable educational and advocacy resources discussing a variety of topics, such as obesity stigma, discrimination, health, wellness and much more.

From the most current information on obesity, to information on weight-loss options, the OAC provides individuals with the tools needed to take a proactive approach in the fight against obesity.

# BMI Chart

Obese  Morbidly Obese

	130	140	150	160	170	180	190	200	210	220	230	240	250	260	270	280	290	300	310	320	330	340	350	360	370	380	390	400
<b>5'0"</b>	25	27	29	31	33	35	37	39	41	43	45	47	49	51	53	55	57	59	61	63	65	67	69	71	72	74	76	78
<b>5'1"</b>	24	26	28	30	32	34	36	37	39	42	44	45	47	49	51	53	55	57	59	61	63	64	66	68	70	72	74	76
<b>5'2"</b>	23	25	27	29	31	33	34	36	38	40	42	44	46	48	50	51	53	55	57	59	61	62	64	66	68	70	72	73
<b>5'3"</b>	23	24	26	28	30	32	33	35	37	39	41	43	44	46	48	50	52	53	55	57	59	60	62	64	66	67	69	71
<b>5'4"</b>	22	24	25	27	29	31	32	34	36	38	40	41	43	45	46	48	50	52	53	55	57	59	60	62	64	65	67	69
<b>5'5"</b>	21	23	25	26	28	30	31	33	35	37	38	40	42	43	45	47	48	50	52	53	55	57	58	60	62	63	65	67
<b>5'6"</b>	21	22	24	25	27	29	30	32	34	36	37	39	40	42	44	45	47	49	50	52	53	55	57	58	60	62	63	65
<b>5'7"</b>	20	22	23	25	26	28	29	31	33	35	36	38	39	41	42	44	46	47	49	50	52	53	55	57	58	60	61	63
<b>5'8"</b>	19	21	22	24	25	27	28	30	32	34	35	37	38	40	41	43	44	46	47	49	50	52	53	55	56	58	59	61
<b>5'9"</b>	19	20	22	23	25	26	28	29	31	33	34	36	37	39	40	41	43	44	46	47	49	50	52	53	55	56	58	59
<b>5'10"</b>	18	20	21	23	24	25	27	28	30	32	33	35	36	37	39	40	42	43	45	46	47	49	50	52	53	55	56	58
<b>5'11"</b>	18	19	21	22	23	25	26	28	29	31	32	34	35	36	38	39	41	42	43	45	46	48	49	50	52	53	55	56
<b>6'0"</b>	17	19	20	21	23	24	25	27	28	30	31	33	34	35	37	38	39	41	42	44	45	46	48	49	50	52	53	54
<b>6'1"</b>	17	18	19	21	22	23	25	26	27	29	30	32	33	34	36	37	38	39	41	42	44	44	45	46	48	49	50	52
<b>6'2"</b>	16	18	19	20	21	23	24	25	27	28	30	31	32	33	35	36	37	39	40	41	42	44	45	46	48	49	50	51
<b>6'3"</b>	16	17	18	19	21	22	23	24	26	28	29	30	31	33	34	35	36	38	39	40	41	43	44	45	46	48	49	50
<b>6'4"</b>	15	17	18	19	20	21	23	24	26	27	28	29	31	32	33	34	35	37	38	39	40	41	43	44	45	46	48	49
<b>6'5"</b>	15	16	17	19	20	21	22	24	25	26	27	29	30	31	32	33	34	36	37	38	39	40	42	43	44	45	46	48

Underweight = Less than 18.4 | Normal = 18.5 - 24.9 | Overweight = 25 - 29.9 | Obese = 30 - 39.9 | Morbidly Obese = Greater than 40

# OAC Membership

Join the only non profit organization that represents the individuals affected by obesity. The OAC is an education and advocacy organization and offers its members a way to get involved in the cause of obesity. Just joining the OAC makes a difference. If obesity affects you, you should be a member of the OAC.

## Membership Categories

### Membership for Individuals

- Individual Member:** \$20/year
- Professional Member:** \$50/year
- Physician Member:** \$150/year

### Membership for Organizations

- Institutional Member:** \$500/year  
*This level gives you access to the OAC's magazine in larger quantities. In addition, it allows you to support the OAC at a higher level.*
- OAC Chairman's Council:** \$1,000 and up  
*The Chairman's Council is the highest membership level of the OAC. Various levels of giving are available within the Council. This is a great way to promote your organization and support the OAC. This category offers the most exposure and member benefits.*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_

State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail Address: \_\_\_\_\_

## Payment Information

Enclosed is my check, payable to the OAC: \$\_\_\_\_\_.

Please charge my credit card for my membership fee:

Discover®  MasterCard®  Visa®  Amex®

Credit Card #: \_\_\_\_\_

Exp. Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Billing Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Please mail to:

### **Obesity Action Coalition**

4511 North Himes Avenue, Suite 250

Tampa, Florida 33614

# OAC Resources

The OAC provides numerous beneficial resources for patients, as well as professionals. OAC resources are complimentary and members of the OAC can request materials in bulk. To request materials, please contact the OAC National Office at (800) 717-3117 or send an email to [info@obesityaction.org](mailto:info@obesityaction.org).

## Brochures/Guides

- *Understanding Obesity Series*
  - *Understanding Obesity Brochure*
  - *Understanding Obesity Poster*
  - *Understanding Morbid Obesity Brochure*
  - *Understanding Obesity Stigma Brochure*
  - *Understanding Childhood Obesity Brochure*
  - *Understanding Childhood Obesity Poster*
- *Advocacy Primer: Your Voice Makes a Difference*
- *OAC Insurance Guide: Working with Your Insurance Provider*
- *State-specific Advocacy Guides*
- *BMI Chart*

## Magazine

- *Your Weight Matters Magazine* – OAC's quarterly education and advocacy magazine

## E-Newsletter

- *Obesity Action Alert* – the OAC's free monthly electronic newsletter

**OAC Web site** – The OAC Web site features an "Obesity" section which details obesity further and provides links to valuable articles concerning the topic

- More than 100 obesity-related topics located on the OAC Web site

## **Obesity Action Coalition**

4511 North Himes Avenue  
Suite 250  
Tampa, FL 33614

(800) 717-3117  
(813) 872-7835  
Fax: (813) 873-7838

**[www.obesityaction.org](http://www.obesityaction.org)**  
**[info@obesityaction.org](mailto:info@obesityaction.org)**