

Dear Doctor +

What Do You Mean BMI and My Weight are Not the Most Important Measures of My Health?



Answer Provided by
David C. Voellinger, MD, FACS, FASMBS, DABOM

“What do you mean, you don’t want me to lose weight?”

This was my patient’s reply when I told her it wasn’t weight-loss that was most important after her bariatric surgery. She looked at me like I had gone crazy. I could see her thinking, “Dr. V, you may need a doctor’s appointment yourself.” Like most patients, she was fixated by the number on the scale. Sometimes she would weigh herself multiple times each day, even though my team stressed only weighing-in once a week at most. Sadly, we even reinforced her belief. What was the first thing she did every time she came to our office? We weighed her. Not only did we document her weight each visit, but we also always talked about “BMI,” an acronym all our patients know stands for Body Mass Index. BMI is a measure for the severity of her disease, as well as the measure of her risk for obesity-related conditions like high blood pressure, sleep apnea, high cholesterol or heart disease. It was even the measure of her success following her bariatric surgery. Everything we did revolved around the number on the scale and her calculated BMI.

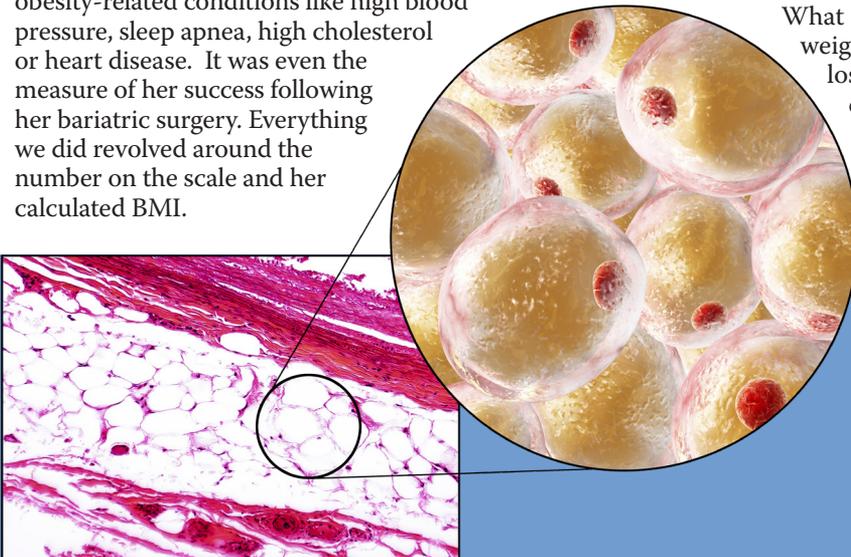
Insight on BMI, Weight-loss and Obesity

The reality is that—as the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) says—“BMI is only a screening tool and not diagnostic of body fat or the health of an individual.” It does allow us to “categorize” weight issues into classes of underweight, healthy weight, overweight, obesity and severe obesity to allow for comparison studies. It can be confusing as we all know people with a normal BMI who are unhealthy. For example, someone with a BMI of 25 can suffer from high blood pressure or high cholesterol due to a genetic predisposition to the disease. We also know people with high BMIs who are healthy, like an NFL linebacker with a BMI of 37 due to their high amount of muscle mass.

What are we really trying to accomplish with weight-loss? Is it simply losing pounds? Is it just losing the load we are carrying to make it easier on our back, our joints and our heart? Maybe partially, but our main goal for weight-loss is to lose FAT.

As Webster’s dictionary defines it, “obesity

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is a condition characterized by the excessive accumulation and storage of fat in the body.” Or, even better (*and fancier*) is the Obesity Medicine Association definition: “obesity is a chronic, relapsing, multifactorial, neurobehavioral disease, wherein an increase in body fat promotes adipose tissue dysfunction and abnormal fat mass physical forces, resulting in adverse metabolic, biomechanical, and psychosocial health consequences.” Put simply, all of this means that too much fat in our fat cells creates abnormal, poorly functioning cells that cause inflammation and obesity-related conditions. Losing fat—not just losing weight—is the key to improved health after bariatric surgery.

Beyond Losing Fat: Gaining Muscle

Truthfully, improved health through weight-loss goes beyond that. Not only do we want to lose fat, but we also want to maintain or (*ideally*) build muscle.

Muscle, also known as lean body mass (*total body mass minus fat mass*) is essential for support, mobility, strength and endurance. Lean body mass is also important for body metabolism or Basal Metabolic Rate. Having more lean body mass results in a higher metabolism. Unfortunately, when you lose weight after bariatric surgery, an average of 20 percent of your total weight lost is lean body mass—not fat mass. Therefore, it is extremely important to consume enough protein and exercise regularly to maintain or rebuild muscle. You will not only burn more calories, but you will also maintain or even improve your metabolism!



You should know that exercise needs to come in two forms:

- **Cardiorespiratory (*cardio*):** Exercise that burns calories and improves your aerobic health.
- **Resistance:** Exercise that maintains and builds muscle mass. The American College of Sports Medicine recommends five days of moderate intensity cardio and at least two days of resistance training each week.



Platinum

Novo Nordisk

Gold

American Society for Metabolic & Bariatric Surgery
Bariatric Advantage
Potomac Currents

Silver

Boehringer Ingelheim
Eisai Inc.
Ethicon
Intercept Pharmaceuticals
Medtronic
New Life Center for Bariatric Surgery

Bronze

FitForMe, LLC
Geisinger Healthcare System
KVK-Tech, Inc.
Medi-Weightloss®
Nestle Health Science
Rhythm
Rocky Mountain Associated Physicians

Patron

Allurion Technologies
Aspire Bariatrics/Aspire Assist
Bariatric Medicine Institute
Baronova
Billings Clinic
BonusLife.com/Walter Medlin, MD
Bronson Bariatric & Metabolic Specialists
ConscienHealth
Creative Cognitions
Jaime Fivecoat
Gainesville Medical Obesity Specialty Clinic
GI Dynamics
HorizonView Health
IU Health Bariatric & Medical Weight Loss
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ProCare Health Bariatric Vitamins & Supplements
Mercy Bariatric Center
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Platinum: \$100,000 and up Bronze: \$5,000 - \$9,999
Gold: \$50,000 - \$99,999 Patron: \$1,000 - \$4,999
Silver: \$10,000 - \$49,999

List as of 04/09/19

Understanding Body Composition

How can you find out your fat mass and muscle mass? In our office, we believe the measurement of your body composition is as important—if not more important—than your weight on a scale. We use a validated four-compartment medical Body Composition Analyzer with an open design, large platform and handrails that make the procedure comfortable and quick—just like stepping on a scale. Every patient receives a baseline body composition analysis followed by a six-month and a 12-month test.

With this information we can determine:

1. Is the patient losing an appropriate amount of fat mass?
2. Is the patient losing too much lean body mass?
3. Are there certain areas of the body that need to be particularly targeted?

We use this information to customize each patient's eating plan and exercise regimen with the help of our dietitians and athletic trainers. Doing this takes the focus off the scale and places it on the patient's overall body composition for a more accurate representation of each patient's progress. It's also a great motivating tool.

Conclusion

As I ultimately explained to my patient, what is most important is not weight-loss but fat loss and maintaining or increasing lean muscle mass. Body composition is way more important than any number on a scale. Weight will always be important in monitoring trends and as a screening tool. However, to provide the best indicator of your health, let's step up on our Body Composition Analyzer and see what's really going on. The light bulb went off and she looked at me like I wasn't really crazy after all.

About the Author:

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ABOUT THE OBESITY ACTION COALITION (OAC)

The Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) is a National non-profit organization dedicated to giving a voice to individuals affected by obesity and helping them along their journey toward better health. Our core focuses are to elevate the conversation of weight and its impact on health, improve access to obesity care, provide science-based education on obesity and its treatments, and fight to eliminate weight bias and discrimination.



VIBRANT COMMUNITY



NATIONAL AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS



ANNUAL CONVENTION



ADVOCACY



PUBLIC EDUCATION

LEARN, CONNECT, ENGAGE

The OAC knows that the journey with weight can be challenging but we also know that great things happen when we learn, connect and engage. That is why the OAC Community exists. Our Community is designed to provide quality education, ongoing support programs, an opportunity to connect, and a place to take action on important issues.

Through the OAC Community, you can get access to:

- Weight & Health Education • Community Blogs
 - Community Discussion Forum
 - Ongoing Support • Meaningful Connections
- AND MUCH MORE**



JOIN TODAY: GO TO OBESITYACTION.ORG/JOIN

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