

Weight

WINTER 2025

FOR YOUR HEALTH

Matters

OAC
Obesity Action Coalition

20
YEARS SINCE 2005

**Special 20th
Anniversary Issue**

p.10

OAC Turns 20!

p.18

**Unlocking the
Mood-Boosting
Power of
Physical Activity**

OAC
Obesity Action Coalition

Weight Matters Magazine is the Official
Publication of the Obesity Action Coalition

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Weight Matters
FOR YOUR HEALTH
Obesity Action Coalition
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Tampa, FL 33614



ARE YOU INTERESTED IN TAKING ACTION TO HELP THE OAC MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

The OAC envisions a better world for people affected by obesity where many current challenges are reduced or eliminated. These issues include pervasive weight bias and stigma, limited access to obesity healthcare and science-based treatment options, and a general lack of understanding around obesity.

You can help! There are many ways you can support the OAC's cause and join us in our mission to make the world a better place for individuals affected by the disease of obesity.



Taking action doesn't have to be hard, intimidating or time consuming. With all the different opportunities available to you, making a difference can be as quick, and easy as you want it to be! OAC members can take action in many ways:



AWARENESS

Sharing quality, unbiased and science-based information to help others understand the disease of obesity and make informed health decisions.



EDUCATION

Raising awareness of obesity as a complex, chronic disease that is influenced by different factors and is not a character flaw or failure.



ADVOCACY

Standing up for the rights of individuals affected by obesity and ensuring that their voices are always heard and represented.



SUPPORT

Helping people affected by obesity by listening to, encouraging and empowering them in their health journeys.

ACT NOW!

Visit OAC's Getting Started with Advocacy page (ObesityAction.org/Action-Center/Getting-Started) and OAC's Action Center (ObesityAction.org/action) today to learn more and get started!

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Weight Matters

FOR YOUR HEALTH

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Weight Matters Magazine is the official publication of the Obesity Action Coalition (OAC). The OAC is an independent National non-profit organization dedicated to giving a voice to those affected by the disease of obesity.

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Message from the



Obesity Action Coalition

Chair of the Board

Hello, OAC Community!

As the OAC begins its 20th year of serving people living with the chronic disease of obesity through education, advocacy and support, my two-year term as the Chair of the National Board of Directors for the OAC is coming to a close. Representing the OAC as Chair of the Board has been a life-changing experience for me and will forever be my most cherished role in my journey as an obesity advocate. Being entrusted with the organizational vision, fiduciary health, and the strategic planning and execution of key initiatives on behalf of the OAC has been a true honor.

We have accomplished so much in two years! The pandemic brought numerous challenges to meeting in person, and I love how the OAC has pivoted to a combination of ways to engage with our community. From digital educational offerings like our Virtual Convention to Health Talks and Fresh Perspectives to bringing back our National Convention, we are connecting with our members in more ways than ever! Additionally, I am particularly proud of the launch of our OAC Youth and Families Program, which focuses on support, education and advocacy for youth living with obesity and their support systems. These teens and young adults are truly inspirational and brave to share their stories with the world! Finally, the OAC's advocacy efforts have multiplied exponentially over the past two years. We are witnessing incredible progress in state-level advocacy and at the federal level, where we have seen significant movement toward CMS coverage of obesity medicines for Medicare and Medicaid patients and with the Treat and Reduce Obesity Act (TROA).

When reflecting on these accomplishments, I cannot express enough gratitude to our phenomenal OAC staff. They made my time as Chair of the Board so special, supporting me every step of the way. Our staff is truly dedicated to the OAC Community, and their countless hours of effort to advocate, educate and support are awe-inspiring. THANK YOU, OAC STAFF, FOR ALL YOU DO! I also want to extend my gratitude to the incredible members of the OAC Board of Directors. This is the most passionate, caring, selfless and involved group of people I have ever worked with. I look forward to continuing my collaboration with this exceptional team as I return to my role as a regular board member.

Next, I am thrilled to introduce our new Chair of the Board, Nikki Massie, MA. This organization is in excellent hands with Nikki, one of the most passionate obesity advocates I've ever known. You may recognize her as the "Bariatric Foodie" due to her strong presence and social media following within our community. I'm excited that we will have a formal handoff at our 20th Anniversary Celebration during the National Convention, held from July 24th–26th. Please join us—you won't want to miss this once-in-a-lifetime celebration of the OAC!

This issue of *Weight Matters Magazine* celebrates our 20th Anniversary. You'll learn more about the history of the OAC and key moments over the past 20 years in obesity care and within our organization.

Remember those amazing youth advocates I mentioned earlier? This issue features a fantastic article about teen Maggie Ervie and her mom, Erika, as we officially launch our *Thrive Together* Youth & Families Program! This program will include the development of numerous OAC initiatives, programs and resources, including another year of scholarships for youth to attend our 20th Anniversary National Convention. To stay updated on all the exciting additions to the *Thrive Together* program, please sign up for our *NEW* quarterly newsletter:

ObesityAction.org/thrivetogether.

In closing, I want to thank all of you who are an integral part of the OAC Community. Your support of the OAC and your fellow Community members is what makes the OAC so special! If you feel compelled to donate to help the OAC continue to advocate, educate and support our community, please visit **ObesityAction.org/donate**.

All the best,

Kristal P. Hartman

Mark Your Calendars: A Year of *Your Weight Matters* Regional, Virtual and National Events

In 2024, the OAC hosted six *Your Weight Matters* Regional events, delivering science-based insights on weight, nutrition and mental health to hundreds of attendees. These free, half-day events provide a unique opportunity to connect with expert speakers, discover practical strategies and weight management resources, and take meaningful steps toward improving your health.



Looking ahead, 2025 promises even more opportunities to participate in *Your Weight Matters* events. The first Regional events of the year will take place on February 22 in Louisville, KY and April 26 in McAllen, TX—with more Regional events to be added as they are announced. You can also join us for the Virtual Convention on **May 17-18** or the National Convention in Washington, DC from **July 24-26**. There's an event format to suit everyone's needs!

Visit YourWeightMatters.com/events to learn more and sign up for alerts so you don't miss out on upcoming events near you!

Commit to Care During Obesity Care Week 2025 in March



Join the OAC as we prepare to lead the next Obesity Care Week (OCW) from **March 3-7, 2025!** OCW is a global initiative to change the way we care about obesity through awareness, education and advocacy, supported by more than 120 champion organizations. The theme of this year's campaign is "Commit to Care," emphasizing that everyone—individuals, healthcare professionals and policymakers—has a role in making obesity care more accessible, affordable and compassionate.

There are many ways you can get involved! From taking a pledge, sharing resources and spreading the word on social media to taking meaningful online actions at the state and federal level, there will be various opportunities to show that you **#CommitToCare**.

Save the date for Obesity Care Week 2025 and sign up for campaign alerts at ObesityCareWeek.org/ocw-alerts.



So Many Opportunities to Take Action

As the 119th Congressional session begins and a new Administration takes office, the OAC is excited to continue driving change through advocacy. This year is especially meaningful as we celebrate our 20th Anniversary—a milestone made possible by OAC advocates!

Our Advocacy Team is hard at work in Quarter One of 2025, having already identified multiple opportunities at the local, state and federal levels to advance access to obesity care. If you want to get involved in these efforts, make sure you visit the OAC Action Center regularly so you can see all the current issues needing your voice (ObesityAction.org/action-center).

20th Anniversary Fun Fact: Since the OAC Action Center launched in 2019, more than 50,000 actions have been taken by OAC advocates and supporters!



Perspectives

Then, Now and Tomorrow: OAC Through the Eyes of Past Leaders

by OAC Staff

The OAC has written many exciting chapters in our story over the past 20 years. Along the way, we've been fortunate to have inspiring leaders—especially our Board of Directors Chairs—who have helped shape our journey. Each Chair has brought a bold vision, distinct goals and a deep personal connection to improving the lives of people affected by obesity.

As we celebrate our 20th anniversary, we wanted to take a moment to sit down with a few of these leaders to reflect on the OAC's journey and what lies ahead. Here are the three questions we asked each Board Chair, both former and current:

Board Chair Q&A



**Jaime Fivecoat,
MBA**

What were your mission and priorities during your term?

As the first Chair of the Board, my term focused on establishing the foundation for the OAC. This included creating bylaws with term limits, setting up weekly meetings with the President and CEO, and developing the structure for Board meetings. We spent much of the time spreading the word that we existed.

How has the OAC changed since your time as Chair?

We went from a few thousand members to more than 80,000. We started the annual conferences and achieved many successes in access to care. In the beginning, we had a big focus on surgical interventions, but we've evolved to also see success in medical and pharmacological treatments. We've also grown from a staff of three to today's much larger team.

What is your hope for the future of the OAC?

I hope that we continue to grow and be a strong influence on all aspects of obesity and weight bias, and that we also participate in more obesity research projects by providing patient experts.



**Ted Kyle,
RPh, MBA**

What were your priorities during your term?

It's incredible to reflect on how much the world's perspective on obesity has evolved since I became Chair of the OAC over a decade ago. Despite these changes, our mission has remained steadfast. My top priority, both then and now, has always been to amplify and support the voices of people living with obesity by working tirelessly to end weight bias and stigma. Addressing stigma is essential because it directly impacts another critical priority—ensuring people have access to comprehensive obesity care in all its forms.

How has the OAC changed since you've been Chair?

The core strengths of the OAC—tireless advocacy, a vibrant community, and a steadfast commitment to serving people living with obesity—have remained constant. However, the organization has grown immensely in its visibility and effectiveness, evolving into an even stronger, more influential voice for this important cause.

What is your hope for the future of the OAC?

My greatest hope for the OAC is that it will continue to expand its reach and lead the way toward a future where individuals living with obesity can enjoy full, thriving lives. This means having equitable access to the care they need while living free from the historical stigma that has long been associated with obesity.



**Amber
Huett-Garcia**

What were your mission and priorities during your term?

During my time as Chair, I led a comprehensive five-year strategic planning process that set the goals for 2017–2021.

How has the OAC changed since your time as Chair?

The OAC has nearly doubled its membership since I was Chair, in part by making it free to join but also through its quest to improve education, support and advocacy while staying focused on our mission. The OAC has grown its coalition of people fighting weight bias and stigma, increased its global presence and significantly contributed to the momentum for comprehensive coverage—such as the Treat and Reduce Obesity Act (TROA) and state-level victories on coverage.

What is your hope for the future of the OAC?

I hope the OAC moves the country and world toward a future with comprehensive coverage and access to obesity care, where bias and stigma stories from people living with obesity feel like lore. I hope the OAC Community continues to grow through membership and partners who strengthen that sense of community we bring now—so we all feel less alone in this fight.



Pam Davis

What were your mission and priorities during your term?

When I was Chair, we focused on becoming THE source of evidence-based information for people with obesity. We decided the best way to share this information was through an annual convention. That first year, we thought we'd be thrilled to have 75 people attend—but we had far more! At our Board retreat, we dreamed of one day having a Public Service Announcement (PSA) on T.V. and finding a celebrity spokesperson.

How has the OAC changed since your time as Chair?

The National Convention has grown into an event with a mix of first-time attendees and those who wouldn't dare miss it. In 2024, Regional Events across the country allowed even more people to get education and support.

With the growth in new treatment options, we've seen growth in membership, sponsors and real conversations about obesity as a disease. Our PSA dreams came true! We now have OAC TV, regional education programs, an expanded magazine, and have taken countless people to Washington, D.C., to meet members of Congress. The OAC has even met Michelle Obama, Brendan Fraser and Queen Latifah!

What is your hope for the future of the OAC?

My hope is for the OAC to grow until it no longer needs to exist—when obesity is truly treated as a disease and people with obesity are respected and offered care without stigma or having to prove the 'return on investment' of treatment. To get there, we need to continue growing our membership, advocacy and support.



**Michelle
"Shelly" Vicari**

What were your mission and priorities during your term?

During my term, my mission was to significantly increase member engagement and empower individuals to take meaningful action. A major priority was launching the OAC Action Center, which offers immediate ways to get involved and answers the common question, 'How can I help?' By encouraging member involvement, we created a platform for individuals to directly contribute to advocacy and awareness.

How has the OAC changed since your time as Chair?

The OAC has seen remarkable growth, expanding membership by more than 30,000. Many members are now actively involved in advocacy efforts. We've made significant strides in fighting for affordable obesity care and improving understanding of obesity science. These advancements have reduced stigma and built a more supportive environment for individuals affected by obesity.

What is your hope for the future of the OAC?

My hope is for more people to learn about and join the OAC. As awareness grows, I want the OAC to continue being the driving force in changes to public policy, access to care and society's attitudes about obesity. With more people taking #OACAction, we can do more to reduce stigma, promote a science-based understanding of obesity and advocate for equitable treatment options.



Patty Nece, JD

What were your priorities during your term?

Shortly before my term as Chair began, the world was struck by the first pandemic in our lifetimes. It was a challenging time for OAC, and many of our programs had to be adjusted. "Pivot" became our new watchword: How could we pivot our programs and advocacy efforts to continue supporting people affected by obesity in a pandemic environment? To meet these needs, we turned to technology and launched our first multi-day Virtual Convention, offering excellent education and fun activities—all online. Approximately 2,000 people registered, including people from several foreign countries. We also continued our fight against weight bias, stigma and discrimination through webinars and interviews, including addressing arguments that people with obesity should not be given priority access to COVID-19 vaccines.

Additionally, we relaunched our in-person National Convention with a small gathering in Las Vegas.

How has the OAC changed since your time as Chair?

The OAC emerged from the pandemic stronger than ever. Our membership and staff have grown, as have our programs and policy advocacy efforts. Our message—that people with obesity deserve access to a full range of treatments—is finally being recognized by key policymakers, including members of Congress and Federal agencies.

What is your hope for the future of the OAC?

I hope OAC continues to grow to change the world for people affected by obesity. There are still many battles to fight. Ultimately, though, my dream is for OAC to no longer need to exist because we've created a world where people with obesity are treated with dignity and respect, receive compassion and understanding, and have full access to science-based care.



Kristal Hartman

What were your mission and priorities during your term?

My mission during my term has been to:

- Support the launch of our childhood obesity initiatives and teen/caregiver support group.
- Support the revamp of the way we provide education, including in-person and virtual programs, such as OAC Regional Events.
- Plan and execute special activities for OAC's 20th anniversary year.
- Support the evolution of OAC's leadership and staff structure to better serve our community.
- Expand OAC advocacy efforts at local, state, and federal levels, particularly around TROA and our progress in 2023 and 2024.

How has the OAC changed since your time as Chair?

As the current Chair, I've been floored by the sheer increase in advocacy efforts from our small but mighty team. We're now operating at a level we only dreamed of 20 years ago, making a huge difference in advocating for access to care! Additionally, I am so proud that OAC has become THE expert in representing the patient voice and experience for individuals living with obesity. We are the resource the world reaches out to. Finally, the amount of education and programming offered across all platforms has reached a level I couldn't have imagined! We've truly achieved and embraced our goal of providing top-notch education to our Community.

What is your hope for the future of the OAC?

My hope is that all people affected by obesity know about the OAC and become part of this vital community of people all working toward the same goals—access to care, quality education and a supportive community where everyone feels safe to be themselves at whatever part of their health journey they are at. As a person living with the chronic disease of obesity, the OAC has been, is and always will be an essential part of my life!

Leading the Way Forward

The OAC wouldn't be where it is today without the leadership and vision of those who have guided our path. 20 years in, they remind us that every step forward matters—and there's a lot more exciting things on the horizon!

As we look to the future, we're thrilled to welcome our incoming Board Chair, Nikki Massie, MA, who will lead the OAC in its next chapter. Nikki brings with her a personal experience of being affected by obesity and an impressive career in nonprofit fundraising and communications. She also most recently co-chaired the OAC's Membership Committee. We are honored to have her as our new Board Chair and look forward to the incredible impact she will make!



OAC Turns 20

Leading the Fight Since 2005

by McKinzie Burrows, OAC Senior Communications Manager

Flashback to 2005—YouTube saw its first video upload, Carrie Underwood won American Idol, and platforms like Facebook and Myspace were rapidly expanding. That spring, during a meeting of U.S. legislators in Washington, DC, someone recognized a significant gap: there was no unified patient advocacy group focused solely on representing individuals affected by the disease of obesity. This realization sparked the idea for the Obesity Action Coalition (OAC), and our journey began with the goal to ensure that the experiences and needs of people with obesity were both seen and addressed.



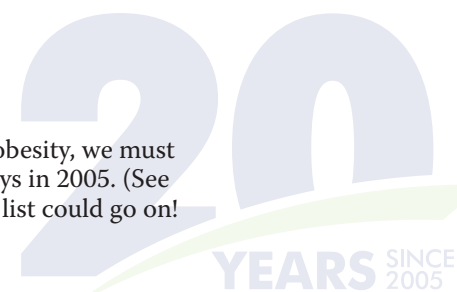
It's Our Birth(year)!

In 2025, the OAC is proud to celebrate two decades of education, advocacy, awareness and support as we mark our 20th Anniversary! This milestone comes at an exciting time in the obesity space. Today, we're witnessing a radical shift in how obesity is understood and addressed around the world. More people recognize obesity as a chronic, complex disease, innovative treatment options are emerging and policymakers are beginning to take meaningful steps toward equitable and affordable access to obesity care.

The OAC has been at the forefront of this progress—leading public conversations, driving daily efforts and working tirelessly behind the scenes to create change.



What 20 Years Have Built



While there's still work to be done to achieve our vision of a better world for people with obesity, we must take this moment to reflect on and celebrate all we've accomplished since our founding days in 2005. (See page "12" for our full history timeline.) These are just a few of the highlights. Trust us, the list could go on!

Education

- **Weight Matters Magazine:** Our flagship publication has distributed more than one million copies of supportive educational content on obesity, weight management, nutrition, mental health and more.
- **Your Weight Matters Events:** From our flagship National Convention in 2012 to our first Virtual Convention in 2020 and our first Regional meetings in 2024, the OAC's *Your Weight Matters* Events have offered science-based, expert-led education on weight, delivering resources and insights like no other.
- **Online Resource Library:** We've built a comprehensive digital library with more than 1,000 articles, guides and videos to support individuals seeking help with obesity-related health topics.

Awareness

- **High-Impact Campaigns:** Initiatives like Obesity Care Week, Stop Weight Bias and the *Your Weight Matters* Challenge have reached millions, elevating conversations about obesity care, stigma, weight and health worldwide.
- **Media Representation:** The OAC has consulted on an Oscar-winning film, worked with thousands of media outlets to share stories of individuals impacted by obesity, and has even met with Oprah and Queen Latifah!
- **Obesity as a Disease:** We've played a pivotal role in advocating for the societal recognition of obesity as a chronic, complex disease.

Advocacy

- **Landmark Policy Wins:** The OAC has been a driving force in advancing both state and national obesity legislation to expand access to obesity care, such as state insurance policies and progress with the Treat and Reduce Obesity Act (TROA).
- **Fighting Stigma:** We've challenged weight bias at every level—from media and healthcare settings to public policy. We've advocated for People-First Language, launched two bias-free image galleries, fought discriminatory workplace/school policies and even outlined the ideal patient experience.
- **Capitol Hill Advocacy:** The OAC has led 10+ National Advocacy Days and delivered expert testimonies at Congress and federal hearings to fight for better obesity care.

Support

- **Building Community:** Events like the *Your Weight Matters* National Convention and Regional meetings have built strong, supportive communities helping individuals feel less alone in their health journeys.
- **Virtual Support:** We launched virtual Zoom support chats and a discussion forum to provide empowering spaces for individuals to connect, share experiences and find encouragement on their journeys.
- **Obesity Care Providers Locator:** We made finding science-based obesity care easier with a user-friendly search tool at ObesityCareProviders.com.

Be a Part of 20 More!

As we celebrate our 20th Anniversary, we invite you to be part of our journey and step into the next chapter with us! There are several ways you can get involved with the OAC. Visit ObesityAction.org/20-years to learn more about our history, see what 20th Anniversary events are coming up and take action to support our cause.

With your support, the next 20 years will bring even more accomplishments to look back on!

Join the OAC Community

Not an OAC Community Member yet? Join today for free and get access to valuable resources in education, advocacy and support! For just \$20 this year in honor of our 20th Anniversary, upgrade to Community+ and enjoy exclusive benefits like early event access, special resources, Virtual Support Chats and more. Join today at ObesityAction.org/community.

Make a Donation

Your support drives the OAC's mission of education, awareness, advocacy and support. Donate \$20 in celebration of our 20th Anniversary, or contribute any amount that fits your budget. Every gift helps us continue making a positive impact in the lives of those affected by obesity. Visit ObesityAction.org/donate

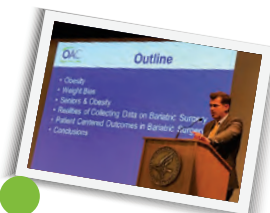
20 Years of Impact

We've been busy over the last two decades!
Here's a glance at some of our biggest milestones and memories.



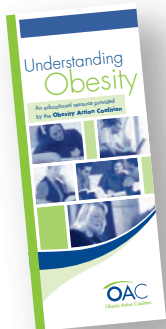
2005

OAC was founded after a meeting of legislators identified a need for a group to represent patients affected by obesity.



2006

OAC releases its first educational resource, the *Understanding Obesity* Brochure.



2007

OAC achieves its first major advocacy win by getting BCBS Tennessee to rescind the IQ testing requirement before bariatric surgery.

OAC visits Congress for the first time to advocate for obesity care.

2008

1 million educational resources shared across the country.

2010

With help from OAC advocacy, the Affordable Care Act ensures obesity can no longer be considered a pre-existing condition, preventing discrimination in insurance coverage.

OAC launches the *Your Weight Matters Campaign* and first-ever PSA to empower individuals to talk about weight and health with a healthcare provider.

OAC provides first FDA hearing testimony on obesity-related issues.

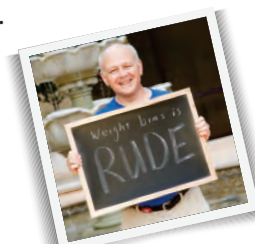
2009

OAC visits the White House to advocate for improved access to obesity care and treatments.



2011

OAC launches a 'Bias Busters' campaign to combat weight bias and stigma.



2012

OAC hosts its inaugural *Your Weight Matters National Convention* in Dallas, TX, bringing together individuals wanting information, resources and support for their weight and health journey.



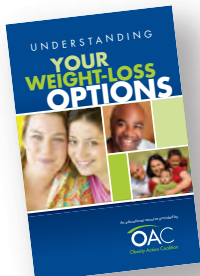
2013

The American Medical Association (AMA) recognizes obesity as a disease, a major advocacy win for OAC.

2014

OAC debuts the *Understanding Your Weight Loss Options* Brochure.

OAC launches the *Your Weight Matters National Convention Scholarship Program* to support attendance for individuals in need.



2015

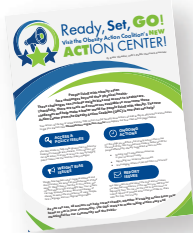
OAC becomes a founding member of the Obesity Care Advocacy Network (OCAN), strengthening collaborative efforts to improve obesity care.

2015



2017

OAC provides eight bariatric surgeries to patients in need during Obesity Care Week.



2019

OAC launches the OAC Action Center, an online resource to help individuals get involved in local, state and national advocacy efforts.



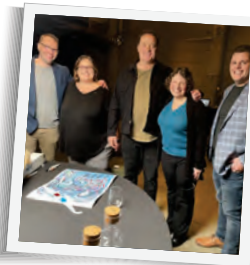
2021

OAC launches an online Resource Library with hundreds of articles, guides and videos for individuals affected by obesity.

2022

OAC expands state advocacy programs to strengthen its grassroots efforts.

OAC consults filmmakers and Brendan Fraser on his Oscar-winning portrayal of a person affected by severe obesity in "The Whale."



2024

YOURWEIGHTMATTERS REGIONAL

OAC launches *Your Weight Matters* Regional events, providing science-based education about weight and health to communities across the country.

OAC launches its second image gallery, the Stop Weight Bias Image Gallery, to combat weight bias in the media with alternative options to stigmatizing imagery.

OAC's advocacy efforts help advance the Treat and Reduce Obesity Act (TROA) farther than it's ever gone before in Congress.

The Biden Administration announces a Proposed Rule to expand access to obesity medications under Medicare and Medicaid—a significant step forward.

2016

Obesity Care Week debuts, with OAC as a Founding Champion.

OAC launches its first free commercial image gallery to combat weight stigma in the media with respectful, humanizing images.

2018

OAC Community launches, offering a space for individuals to learn, connect and support each other.

OAC launches **ObesityCareProviders.com** to help individuals find healthcare providers trained in obesity care.

2020

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) adopts People-First Language and lists OAC as a trusted resource.

OAC hosts its first *Your Weight Matters* Virtual Convention to provide science-based weight and health education to a broader audience.

OAC launches the Stop Weight Bias Campaign to raise awareness, put a stop to weight bias and push equality forward.

OAC debuts OAC TV, which now includes Health Talks, Fresh Perspectives and other digital education resources.



2023

OAC hosts 13 families at its National Convention as part of its "Empower Early" initiative.



THRIVING WITH



MAGGIE'S STORY

by Mckinzie Burrows, OAC Senior Communications Manager and Michelle "Shelly" Vicari, OAC Senior Programs Manager

Maggie Ervie is a charismatic teenager from Kansas City and one of the first participants in the Obesity Action Coalition's (OAC) new *Thrive Together* Youth and Families Program. Beta-tested in 2023 and officially launched in January 2025, the program empowers youth and families with tailored resources and support to address common challenges such as weight management, body image, healthy eating, physical activity, mental health and more.



A Long Road

When Maggie was three years old, her mom, Erika, sensed something wasn't right. Maggie's appetite and rapid weight gain didn't align with what Erika expected from a healthy toddler. Despite consulting multiple pediatricians, the family spent years searching for answers. The explanations they were given were less than helpful, merely suggesting that everyone metabolizes food differently and that Maggie likely had "bad genetics."

Frustrated and concerned, Erika watched her daughter's health worsen. Determined to find answers before Maggie reached her teenage years, Erika emptied her savings in a desperate search for help.

By the time Maggie started middle school, her vibrant personality had faded. Each night, she cried, feeling uncomfortable in her body and increasingly isolated from her peers. One memory stands out in particular: wearing her father's 3XL t-shirts to school, only to face cruel teasing from classmates about her size.

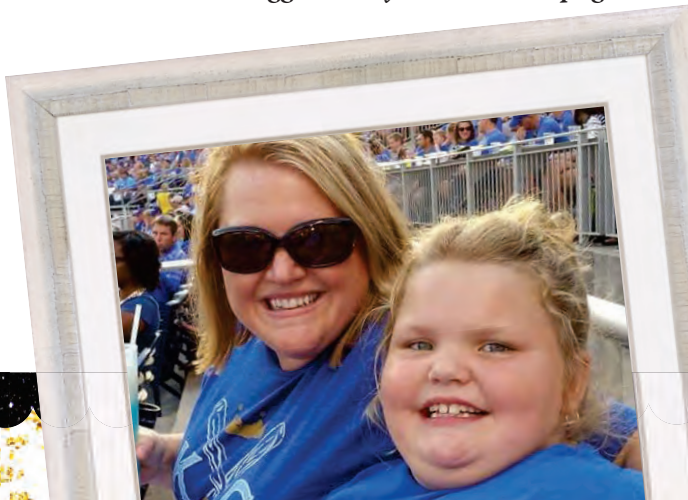
The Power of a Diagnosis

After more than eight years of searching, the trajectory finally began to shift. A pediatrician recommended a new obesity clinic in Kansas City, where, for the first time, someone explained that that obesity is a disease—and that there are medical treatments for it. With a team of doctors who understood how to help, Maggie and her family began a treatment plan that ultimately led to gastric sleeve surgery in 2021 when she was 13 years old.

But getting treatment was not without its challenges. Over time, Maggie began struggling with persistent hunger and feeling satisfied after meals. Working with her doctor, she was prescribed medication to help address these challenges.

Another challenge during this journey was facing judgment and unsolicited opinions from others about their choices for Maggie's health. Few people truly understood their experiences, and there were limited resources available to guide them.

Maggie's Story continued on page 16



“With a team of doctors who understood how to help, Maggie and her family began a treatment plan that ultimately led to gastric sleeve surgery in 2021 when she was 13 years old.”





“For the first time, she felt seen, validated and supported, forming lifelong friendships through the experience.”



Finding the OAC Community

The Obesity Action Coalition (OAC), in collaboration with pediatricians, including Maggie's, beta-tested our youth and families program in 2023. When Maggie and her mom were invited to participate in the OAC's National Convention in Orlando, Florida, it became a life-changing experience. The Convention offered special programming and resources specifically designed for youth and their families navigating childhood obesity.

At the Convention, Maggie connected with other teenagers who understood the challenges of managing weight and health at a young age. For the first time, she felt seen, validated and supported, forming lifelong friendships through the experience.

While Maggie enjoyed bonding with her peers that weekend, Erika immersed herself in evidence-based education on obesity, delivered by leading physicians, researchers, dietitians and health psychologists. “She looked like a schoolgirl,” Maggie joked, recalling how her mom eagerly took notes and shared everything she learned in their hotel room at night.

Back home, Erika, a high school Spanish teacher, couldn't resist sharing her favorite takeaways with her students. Her experiences opened the door for candid conversations about weight stigma and the importance of treating people with dignity and respect, regardless of body type.

Sixteen and Thriving

Today, Maggie is sixteen years old, and she has accomplished many things that people far beyond her years have not. She has undergone bariatric surgery, traveled across the country to attend a life-changing convention, advocates for other teenagers and even appeared on Oprah Winfrey's special, *An Oprah Special: Shame, Blame, and the Weight Loss Revolution*, to share her experiences with obesity.



Maggie is thriving. She glows with confidence and joy, able to focus on just being a kid instead of constantly battling her body. This means going on walks with her family, spending more time with friends and even getting physical activity through cheerleading.

She and her mom are also counting down the days until they travel to Washington, DC, to attend the OAC's 2025 National Convention from July 24-26! Maggie is excited to reconnect with friends in person again and also to make new ones, as the OAC is sending 20 families to the Convention in 2025 through its new *Thrive Together* Youth and Families Program in honor of its 20th Anniversary.

When asked what advice she would give to other teens facing similar battles with weight, Maggie said:

“Keep working at it, even if you think you want to stop. Keep trying to reach your goals. Find your real friends and get supporters by your side—you can do anything from there. Community is everything.”

The biggest fight Maggie faces now is accessing ongoing obesity care to maintain her weight loss. Medication works alongside her surgery as a tool to help her manage her weight, but insurance won't cover it, forcing Erika to jump through hoops to keep Maggie on her treatment plan. Like most parents, Erika and her husband are willing to do anything for their daughter, and the renewed brightness on Maggie's face makes it all worthwhile.

A New Chapter for Teens Like Maggie

Struggling with weight and health is hard for anybody, but it can be even harder as a young person trying to find their identity. Millions of other children and teenagers can relate to Maggie's story. Yet finding the right support is not as simple as going to the doctor for the flu or a broken leg. On top of health issues is the issue of weight stigma, judgment from society for seeking treatment, and the pain from bullying that so many children with obesity face.

That's why the OAC's new *Thrive Together* Youth and Families Program was established—to foster a safe, inclusive and encouraging space where families can access credible information, connect with a supportive community and take actionable steps toward better health.

To learn about the *Thrive Together* program, visit ObesityAction.org/thrivetogether.

About the Author:

Mckinzie Burrows, OAC Senior Communications Manager, oversees the management and execution of OAC's organizational communications, both internally and externally. This includes organizational promotional activities, event and awareness campaign promotions, narrative shaping and working with media representatives. She is passionate about helping nonprofits tell stories that inspire others.

Michelle “Shelly” Vicari, OAC Senior Program Manager and Past OAC Chair, leads OAC's Thrive Together Youth and Families Program.



Unlocking the Mood-Boosting Power of Physical Activity

by Rylan Rosario, MA, CBHC





The winter months can be challenging for mental health, with shorter days, colder temperatures and less natural light. It's normal to feel more sluggish and unmotivated during this time, but how do you know when your mood calls for more than a fresh cup of coffee or a check-in call with a supportive loved one? When does a seasonal change lead to deeper feelings of sadness, lethargy and isolation?

According to Mental Health America (MHA), 5% of the U.S. population experiences seasonal depression each year. Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), a subtype of depression, typically begins in the fall and lasts through the end of winter.

Winter might make you want to lounge more and curl up under the covers, but movement can be one of the best ways to support yourself during this time. A steady routine of physical activity, such as running or hiking, can be beneficial, but it doesn't need to be rigorous if it doesn't feel good. By focusing on movement that feels enjoyable or rewarding, you can significantly improve both your mood and your overall health.

This article will explore specific ways staying active during winter can boost mental health and share practical tips for making movement more enjoyable and fulfilling.

The Winter Blues and Physical Activity

The "winter blues" refers to feelings of sadness and low energy that many people experience during the colder months. Shorter daylight hours, cold temperatures and fewer opportunities to spend time outdoors can lead to decreased energy levels, feelings of isolation and a drop in overall mood.

A lack of physical activity during winter can worsen these feelings, creating a cycle of low mood and lethargy. Fortunately, physical activity is an excellent remedy. Exercise prompts the body to release endorphins, which are known for their mood-boosting effects. It can also help reduce stress and anxiety associated with the winter season by lowering cortisol levels, a hormone that may contribute to low mood. Even simple and brief periods of movement improve energy and mood, making physical activity a powerful strategy for managing the winter blues.

Physical Activity continued on page 20

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Reframing Movement as Joyful

For many, exercise can feel like an obligation or a chore. Traditional fitness routines often emphasize performance, weight loss or achieving specific metrics, which can make physical activity feel more like punishment than pleasure. But staying active doesn't have to be about meeting goals—it can be about finding joy.

Reframing movement as fun and fulfilling can significantly change how we experience it. Instead of forcing yourself to do a workout you dread, consider the types of movement that bring you joy. Maybe it's dancing in your living room to your favorite songs, taking a brisk walk in the snow while admiring the winter scenery or trying a winter sport like ice skating or sledding. If you enjoy the gym but prefer staying home, advancements in home fitness equipment now make it easier to stay active. You can take a cycling class with your favorite jams and connect with people worldwide—all from the comfort of your living room. The key is to choose activities you genuinely enjoy, focusing on the experience rather than any particular outcome.

Joyful movement is about connecting with your body in a positive way. When you do something you love, you're more likely to stick with it and enjoy the mental health benefits. Whether it's walking in nature at sunset or practicing restorative yoga with your best friend, moving your body in ways that feel good can help combat the winter blues and bring moments of happiness to your day.

Practical Tips to Stay Active During Winter

Winter offers a unique opportunity to embrace seasonal activities that are both enjoyable and physically engaging. Activities like ice skating, skiing, sledding and snowshoeing not only keep your body moving but also allow you to appreciate the beauty of the season. If you have access to these options, they can be a wonderful way to stay active while making the most of winter.

● Embrace Indoor Options:

If the cold weather feels too daunting, there are plenty of indoor activities that can help you keep moving. Consider trying online dance classes, yoga sessions or stretching routines from the comfort of your home. Countless free resources are available online, from YouTube videos to virtual fitness apps, that cater to different interests and fitness levels. Indoor activities can help you stay warm while still reaping the benefits of movement.

● Use Everyday Moments to Stay Active:

You don't need a formal workout to stay active—small movements throughout the day can add up. Take the stairs instead of the elevator, walk around the house during phone calls or do a few squats while waiting for your morning coffee to brew. Incorporating movement into your daily routine can help you stay active without the pressure of a structured exercise plan.

● Find a Movement Buddy:

Staying active is often more enjoyable when you do it with others. Find a friend or family member to be your movement buddy, whether that means meeting for a walk, taking an online class together or simply holding each other accountable. The social connection adds an extra layer of joy, making movement feel less like a chore and more like a shared experience.

These practical tips can help you discover accessible options that work for different fitness levels, ensuring that staying active is both enjoyable and sustainable throughout the winter.



LET'S GET CONNECTED!

Social media can be a powerful tool in your weight and health journey. The Obesity Action Coalition has created a supportive social media community where we raise awareness about obesity, share valuable educational resources, advocate for ending weight bias and promote expanded access to care. Join us and connect with others who share similar experiences in a safe and welcoming space.

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 [YouTube.com/ObesityAction](https://www.youtube.com/ObesityAction)

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Discover the Power of Wegovy®



Actor portrayals

What is Wegovy®?

WEGOVY® (semaglutide) injection 2.4 mg is an injectable prescription medicine used with a reduced calorie diet and increased physical activity:

- to reduce the risk of major cardiovascular events such as death, heart attack, or stroke in adults with known heart disease and with either obesity or overweight
- that may help adults with obesity or overweight with weight-related medical problems, lose excess body weight and keep the weight off

Wegovy® contains semaglutide and should not be used with other semaglutide-containing products or other GLP-1 receptor agonist medicines.

It is not known if Wegovy® is safe and effective for use in children under 12 years of age.

Important Safety Information

What is the most important information I should know about Wegovy®?

Wegovy® may cause serious side effects, including:

- **Possible thyroid tumors, including cancer.** Tell your healthcare provider if you get a lump or swelling in your neck, hoarseness, trouble swallowing, or shortness of breath. These may be symptoms of thyroid cancer. In studies with rodents, Wegovy® and medicines that work like Wegovy® caused thyroid tumors, including thyroid cancer. It is not known if Wegovy® will cause thyroid tumors or a type of thyroid cancer called medullary thyroid carcinoma (MTC) in people
- Do not use Wegovy® if you or any of your family have ever had a type of thyroid cancer called medullary thyroid carcinoma (MTC) or if you have an endocrine system condition called Multiple Endocrine Neoplasia syndrome type 2 (MEN 2)

Do not use Wegovy® if:

- you or any of your family have ever had a type of thyroid cancer called medullary thyroid carcinoma (MTC) or if you have an endocrine system condition called Multiple Endocrine Neoplasia syndrome type 2 (MEN 2)
- you have had a serious allergic reaction to semaglutide or any of the ingredients in Wegovy®

Before using Wegovy®, tell your healthcare provider if you have any other medical conditions, including if you:

- have or have had problems with your pancreas or kidneys
- have type 2 diabetes and a history of diabetic retinopathy
- have or have had depression, suicidal thoughts, or mental health issues
- are scheduled to have surgery or other procedures that use anesthesia or deep sleepiness (deep sedation)
- are pregnant or plan to become pregnant. Wegovy® may harm your unborn baby. You should stop using Wegovy® 2 months before you plan to become pregnant
- are breastfeeding or plan to breastfeed. It is not known if Wegovy® passes into your breast milk

Tell your healthcare provider about all the medicines you take, including prescription and over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, and herbal supplements. Wegovy® may affect the way some medicines work and some medicines may affect the way Wegovy® works. Tell your healthcare provider if you are taking other medicines to treat diabetes, including sulfonylureas or insulin. Wegovy® slows stomach emptying and can affect medicines that need to pass through the stomach quickly.



Lose weight

For adults with obesity or overweight who also have weight-related medical problems, along with a reduced calorie diet and increased physical activity



Keep it off



Lower the risk of major cardiovascular (CV) events

Such as death, heart attack, or stroke in adults with known heart disease and obesity or overweight, along with a reduced calorie diet and increased physical activity

Wegovy® is the only FDA-approved weight-management medicine that is also approved to reduce the risk of major cardiovascular events such as death, heart attack, or stroke.

In medical studies, people who stopped taking Wegovy® generally regained weight.

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wegovy®

semaglutide injection **2.4 mg**



Check your cost and coverage at **Wegovy.com** before asking your health care professional about **Wegovy®**.

Important Safety Information (cont'd)

What are the possible side effects of Wegovy®?

Wegovy® may cause serious side effects, including:

- **inflammation of your pancreas (pancreatitis).** Stop using Wegovy® and call your healthcare provider right away if you have severe pain in your stomach area (abdomen) that will not go away, with or without vomiting. You may feel the pain from your abdomen to your back
- **gallbladder problems.** Wegovy® may cause gallbladder problems, including gallstones. Some gallstones may need surgery. Call your healthcare provider if you have symptoms, such as pain in your upper stomach (abdomen), fever, yellowing of the skin or eyes (jaundice), or clay-colored stools
- **increased risk of low blood sugar (hypoglycemia), especially those who also take medicines for diabetes such as insulin or sulfonylureas.** This can be a serious side effect. Talk to your healthcare provider about how to recognize and treat low blood sugar and check your blood sugar before you start and while you take Wegovy®. Signs and symptoms of low blood sugar may include dizziness or light-headedness, blurred vision, anxiety, irritability or mood changes, sweating, slurred speech, hunger, confusion or drowsiness, shakiness, weakness, headache, fast heartbeat, or feeling jittery
- **kidney problems (kidney failure).** In people who have kidney problems, diarrhea, nausea, and vomiting may cause a loss of fluids (dehydration), which may cause kidney problems to get worse. It is important for you to drink fluids to help reduce your chance of dehydration
- **severe stomach problems.** Stomach problems, sometimes severe, have been reported in people who use Wegovy®. Tell your healthcare provider if you have stomach problems that are severe or will not go away.
- **serious allergic reactions.** Stop using Wegovy® and get medical help right away, if you have any symptoms of a serious allergic reaction, including swelling of your face, lips, tongue, or throat; problems breathing or swallowing; severe rash or itching; fainting or feeling dizzy; or very rapid heartbeat

- **change in vision in people with type 2 diabetes.** Tell your healthcare provider if you have changes in vision during treatment with Wegovy®
- **increased heart rate.** Wegovy® can increase your heart rate while you are at rest. Tell your healthcare provider if you feel your heart racing or pounding in your chest and it lasts for several minutes
- **depression or thoughts of suicide.** You should pay attention to any mental changes, especially sudden changes in your mood, behaviors, thoughts, or feelings. Call your healthcare provider right away if you have any mental changes that are new, worse, or worry you
- **food or liquid getting into the lungs during surgery or other procedures that use anesthesia or deep sleepiness (deep sedation).** Wegovy® may increase the chance of food getting into your lungs during surgery or other procedures. Tell all your healthcare providers that you are taking Wegovy® before you are scheduled to have surgery or other procedures

The most common side effects of Wegovy® may include:

nausea, diarrhea, vomiting, constipation, stomach (abdomen) pain, headache, tiredness (fatigue), upset stomach, dizziness, feeling bloated, belching, low blood sugar in people with type 2 diabetes, gas, stomach flu, heartburn, and runny nose or sore throat.

Wegovy® is a prescription medication. You are encouraged to report negative side effects of prescription drugs to the FDA. Visit www.fda.gov/medwatch, or call 1-800-FDA-1088.

FDA, US Food and Drug Administration.

Please see Brief Summary of Information about Wegovy® on the following page.

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<p>Brief Summary of Information about WEGOVY® (semaglutide) injection</p> <p>wegovy® semaglutide injection 2.4 mg</p> <p>Rx Only This information is not comprehensive. How to get more information:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk to your healthcare provider or pharmacist • Visit www.novo-pi.com/wegovy.pdf to obtain the FDA-approved product labeling • Call 1-833-Wegovy-1 	<p>How should I use WEGOVY®?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WEGOVY® is injected under the skin (subcutaneously) of your stomach (abdomen), thigh, or upper arm. Do not inject WEGOVY® into a muscle (intramuscularly) or vein (intravenously). • Change (rotate) your injection site with each injection. Do not use the same site for each injection. • Use WEGOVY® 1 time each week, on the same day each week, at any time of the day. • If you take too much WEGOVY®, call your healthcare provider or Poison Help line at 1-800-222-1222 or go to the nearest hospital emergency room right away. Advice is also available online at poisonhelp.org.
<p>What is the most important information I should know about WEGOVY®?</p> <p>WEGOVY® may cause serious side effects, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Possible thyroid tumors, including cancer. Tell your healthcare provider if you get a lump or swelling in your neck, hoarseness, trouble swallowing, or shortness of breath. These may be symptoms of thyroid cancer. In studies with rodents, WEGOVY® and medicines that work like WEGOVY® caused thyroid tumors, including thyroid cancer. It is not known if WEGOVY® will cause thyroid tumors or a type of thyroid cancer called medullary thyroid carcinoma (MTC) in people. • Do not use WEGOVY® if you or any of your family have ever had a type of thyroid cancer called medullary thyroid carcinoma (MTC), or if you have an endocrine system condition called Multiple Endocrine Neoplasia syndrome type 2 (MEN 2). 	<p>What are the possible side effects of WEGOVY®?</p> <p>WEGOVY® may cause serious side effects, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See “What is the most important information I should know about WEGOVY®?” • inflammation of your pancreas (pancreatitis). Stop using WEGOVY® and call your healthcare provider right away if you have severe pain in your stomach area (abdomen) that will not go away, with or without vomiting. You may feel the pain from your abdomen to your back. • gallbladder problems. WEGOVY® may cause gallbladder problems including gallstones. Some gallbladder problems need surgery. Call your healthcare provider if you have any of the following symptoms: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ pain in your upper stomach (abdomen) ◦ yellowing of skin or eyes (jaundice) ◦ fever ◦ clay-colored stools
<p>What is WEGOVY®?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WEGOVY® is an injectable prescription medicine used with a reduced calorie diet and increased physical activity: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ to reduce the risk of major cardiovascular events such as death, heart attack, or stroke in adults with known heart disease and with either obesity or overweight. ◦ that may help adults and children aged 12 years and older with obesity, or some adults with excess weight (overweight) who also have weight-related medical problems to lose weight and keep the weight off. • WEGOVY® contains semaglutide and should not be used with other semaglutide-containing products or other GLP-1 receptor agonist medicines. • It is not known if WEGOVY® is safe and effective for use in children under 12 years of age. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increased risk of low blood sugar (hypoglycemia), especially those who also take medicines to treat type 2 diabetes mellitus such as an insulin or a sulfonylureas. Low blood sugar in patients with type 2 diabetes who receive WEGOVY® can be both a serious and common side effect. Talk to your healthcare provider about how to recognize and treat low blood sugar. You should check your blood sugar before you start taking WEGOVY® and while you take WEGOVY®. Signs and symptoms of low blood sugar may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ dizziness or light-headedness ◦ sweating ◦ blurred vision ◦ slurred speech ◦ anxiety ◦ hunger ◦ irritability or mood changes ◦ confusion or drowsiness ◦ fast heartbeat ◦ feeling jittery
<p>Do not use WEGOVY® if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • you or any of your family have ever had a type of thyroid cancer called MTC or if you have an endocrine system condition called MEN 2. • you have had a serious allergic reaction to semaglutide or any of the ingredients in WEGOVY®. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • kidney problems (kidney failure). In people who have kidney problems, diarrhea, nausea, and vomiting may cause a loss of fluids (dehydration) which may cause kidney problems to get worse. It is important for you to drink fluids to help reduce your chance of dehydration. • severe stomach problems. Stomach problems, sometimes severe, have been reported in people who use WEGOVY®. Tell your healthcare provider if you have stomach problems that are severe or will not go away. • serious allergic reactions. Stop using WEGOVY® and get medical help right away, if you have any symptoms of a serious allergic reaction including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ swelling of your face, lips, tongue or throat ◦ severe rash or itching ◦ problems breathing or swallowing ◦ very rapid heartbeat ◦ fainting or feeling dizzy
<p>Before using WEGOVY®, tell your healthcare provider if you have any other medical conditions, including if you:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have or have had problems with your pancreas or kidneys. • have type 2 diabetes and a history of diabetic retinopathy. • have or have had depression or suicidal thoughts, or mental health issues. • are scheduled to have surgery or other procedures that use anesthesia or deep sleepiness (deep sedation). • are pregnant or plan to become pregnant. WEGOVY® may harm your unborn baby. You should stop using WEGOVY® 2 months before you plan to become pregnant. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Pregnancy Exposure Registry: There is a pregnancy exposure registry for women who use WEGOVY® during pregnancy. The purpose of this registry is to collect information about the health of you and your baby. Talk to your healthcare provider about how you can take part in this registry or you may contact Novo Nordisk at 1-877-390-2760. • are breastfeeding or plan to breastfeed. It is not known if WEGOVY® passes into your breast milk. You should talk with your healthcare provider about the best way to feed your baby while using WEGOVY®. <p>Tell your healthcare provider about all the medicines you take, including prescription and over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, and herbal supplements. WEGOVY® may affect the way some medicines work and some medicines may affect the way WEGOVY® works. Tell your healthcare provider if you are taking other medicines to treat diabetes, including sulfonylureas or insulin. WEGOVY® slows stomach emptying and can affect medicines that need to pass through the stomach quickly.</p> <p>Know the medicines you take. Keep a list of them to show your healthcare provider and pharmacist when you get a new medicine.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • change in vision in people with type 2 diabetes. Tell your healthcare provider if you have changes in vision during treatment with WEGOVY®. • increased heart rate. WEGOVY® can increase your heart rate while you are at rest. Your healthcare provider should check your heart rate while you take WEGOVY®. Tell your healthcare provider if you feel your heart racing or pounding in your chest and it lasts for several minutes. • depression or thoughts of suicide. You should pay attention to any mental changes, especially sudden changes in your mood, behaviors, thoughts, or feelings. Call your healthcare provider right away if you have any mental changes that are new, worse, or worry you. • food or liquid getting into the lungs during surgery or other procedures that use anesthesia or deep sleepiness (deep sedation). WEGOVY® may increase the chance of food getting into your lungs during surgery or other procedures. Tell all your healthcare providers that you are taking WEGOVY® before you are scheduled to have surgery or other procedures. <p>The most common side effects of WEGOVY® in adults or children aged 12 years and older may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • nausea • stomach (abdomen) pain • dizziness • gas • diarrhea • headache • feeling bloated • stomach flu • vomiting • tiredness (fatigue) • belching • heartburn • constipation • upset stomach • runny nose or sore throat • low blood sugar in people with type 2 diabetes <p>Talk to your healthcare provider about any side effect that bothers you or does not go away. These are not all the possible side effects of WEGOVY®.</p> <p>Call your doctor for medical advice about side effects. You may report side effects to FDA at 1-800-FDA-1088.</p>

Manufactured by: Novo Nordisk A/S, DK-2880 Bagsvaerd, Denmark
More detailed information is available upon request.
Available by prescription only.
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For more information, go to startWegovy.com or call 1-833-Wegovy-1.

PATENT Information: <http://novonordisk-us.com/products/product-patents.html>

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US24SEMO01815 December 2024



Benefits of Movement Beyond Mood Boosting

While improving mood is a key benefit of staying active, movement offers additional advantages that can enhance well-being during the winter. Regular physical activity is known to improve sleep quality, which can be especially helpful for those experiencing disrupted sleep patterns during the colder months. Better sleep, in turn, supports a more positive mood and higher energy levels.

Movement also helps reduce anxiety. Physical activity regulates the body's stress response, easing feelings of tension and promoting relaxation. Even gentle activities, such as yoga or stretching, can have a calming effect, helping to alleviate anxiety and improve overall mental health.

Additionally, staying active can strengthen immune health. Exercise boosts circulation and immune function, which is particularly important during winter when colds and the flu are more common. Feeling more connected to your body through regular movement can also foster a sense of empowerment and resilience, contributing to an overall sense of well-being.

Overcoming Common Barriers

There are several common barriers to staying active during winter, including lack of motivation, cold weather and busy schedules. However, there are simple ways to overcome these challenges.

If motivation is a struggle, start by setting small, realistic goals. Even a 10-minute walk or a short stretching session can make a difference and help build momentum. Dressing warmly and in layers can make outdoor activities more comfortable, even on the chilliest days. For those pressed for time, look for opportunities to incorporate movement into short, manageable windows throughout the day—every little bit counts.

Another way to overcome these barriers is to focus on the immediate benefits of physical activity. Remind yourself how good you feel after moving your body, and use that feeling as motivation to keep going. By keeping your goals realistic and choosing activities you enjoy, you can overcome obstacles and make movement a regular part of your winter routine.

The Joy of Movement in Winter

Movement can be a powerful tool for boosting both mood and physical health during the winter months. By reframing exercise as joyful movement, finding activities that bring genuine enjoyment and incorporating practical ways to stay active, it's possible to combat the winter blues and feel more energized and uplifted.

Experiment with different forms of movement to discover what brings you joy, and remember that every bit counts. Whether it's dancing, walking, stretching or playing in the snow, finding ways to move your body can make a big difference in how you feel this winter. Take small steps, celebrate your progress and embrace the joy that movement can bring.

About the Author:

Rylan Rosario, MA, CBHC, is a psychology associate and certified behavioral health coach committed to helping individuals who are battling chronic health challenges. Diagnosed with epilepsy as a teen, Rylan understands the importance of integrated mental health treatment and now dedicates her work to it. She currently works in health psychology in private practice.



Beat the Winter Blues:

Creative Ideas for the Whole Family

by Michelle "Shelly" Vicari, OAC Senior Program Manager

When the cold, gray days keep you indoors, it's easy to feel like fun is on pause. But don't let the chilly weather get you down! With these creative activities and delicious recipes, you can turn even the gloomiest day into a fun adventure. Whether you're looking for ways to entertain little ones, older kids or teens, we've got you covered. Get ready to laugh, move and make memories together.

Fun Indoor Activities for the Whole Family

For Young Kids (Ages 3-8)

Pillow Fort Adventures

Gather pillows, blankets and couch cushions to create the ultimate indoor fort. Once it's built, turn it into a story time nook with books and flashlights.

Book suggestion: "We're Going on a Bear Hunt" by Michael Rosen and Helen Oxenbury. This timeless classic follows a family journeying through rivers, forests and caves in search of a bear. Bring stuffed bears into your fort to create a "bear cave."

Animal Moves Game

Take turns acting out different animals and guessing what they are. Gallop like a horse, slither like a snake or hop like a frog.

For older kids, use the animal moves to create a group story. For example: "Once upon a time, there was a horse galloping through the forest. Suddenly, it met a snake slithering on the ground, heading to the store." Encourage everyone to take turns adding to the story with a new animal and movement. It's a great way to blend creativity and physical activity!

Balloon Volleyball or Keep It Up

Blow up a balloon and use it to play volleyball in your living room. Set up a "net" using a piece of string or tape on the floor. If space is tight or you're playing alone, see how long you can keep the balloon in the air.

DIY Playdough Making

Most people have fond memories of squishing and shaping playdough into fun creatures. You can buy tubs online or from the store, or even better...try making your own!

Playdough Recipe

Ingredients:

- 2 cups flour
- 1 cup salt
- 1 cup water
- 1 tbsp. vegetable oil
- Food coloring (optional)

Mix the flour and salt in a large bowl. Add water and oil, stirring until a dough forms. Knead until smooth. If you want colorful playdough, add a few drops of food coloring while kneading. Store in an airtight container for up to a week. Use kitchen tools like rolling pins, cookie cutters or a garlic press for your creations. Add buttons, rocks, twigs or pipe cleaners for extra details.



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For Older Kids (Ages 9-12)

DIY Escape Room

Create a mini escape room challenge using puzzles, riddles and clues hidden around the house. Include a mix of brain teasers and active tasks to keep players engaged:

- **Brain Teaser:**

"I have keys but no door."

Place the clue near a keyboard for players to find.

- **Active Task:**

Tape a note on a mirror that says:

"Spin three times and hop on one foot while chanting, 'Next clue, where are you?' Once you're done, look behind the mirror!"



Art Gallery

Break out the art supplies and have everyone create something unique. Once the artwork is finished, display it and hold a "gallery showing" to admire the masterpieces. Invite each artist to describe their work, and consider inviting neighbors or grandparents to join the event.

Mini Sports Tournament

Host an indoor tournament with games like sock bowling (use empty plastic water bottles as pins) or paper airplane races. Keep a scoreboard and create medals or ribbons for the winners.

*Kid's Corner
continued on page 30*



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Don't take Lomaira if you have a history of cardiovascular disease (e.g., coronary artery disease, stroke, arrhythmias, congestive heart failure or uncontrolled high blood pressure); are taking or have taken a monoamine oxidase inhibitor drug (MAOI) within the past 14 days; have overactive thyroid, glaucoma (increased pressure in the eyes), agitation or a history of drug abuse; are pregnant, nursing, or allergic to the sympathomimetic amines such as phentermine or any of the ingredients in Lomaira. (Cont. on next page)

¹ *Phentermine HCl is the active ingredient in Lomaira™

*Body Mass Index (BMI) measures the amount of fat in the body based on height and weight. BMI is measured in kg/m².

Lomaira™ (phentermine hydrochloride USP) 8mg tablets, CIV

Taking phentermine with other drugs for weight loss is not recommended. Primary pulmonary hypertension (PPH), a rare fatal lung disease, has been reported in patients who had taken a combination of phentermine and fenfluramine or dexfenfluramine for weight loss. The possible association between phentermine use alone and PPH cannot be ruled out. Patients should report immediately if they experience any decrease in the amount of exercise that they can normally tolerate, shortness of breath, chest or heart pain, fainting or swelling in the lower legs.

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If your body becomes adjusted to the maximum dose of phentermine so that its effects are experienced less strongly, the maximum dose should not be exceeded in an attempt to increase the effect.

Caution is advised when engaging in potentially hazardous activity such as driving or operating machinery while taking phentermine. Phentermine has the potential to be abused. Keep Lomaira in a safe place to prevent theft, accidental overdose, misuse or abuse. Using alcohol with phentermine may result in an adverse drug reaction.

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*Body Mass Index (BMI) measures the amount of fat in the body based on height and weight. BMI is measured in kg/m².

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For Teens (Ages 13+)

Indoor Photography Scavenger Hunt

Give teens a list of creative photo challenges and let them use their phones or cameras to capture each item. At the end, share and compare photos.

Creative Photo Challenge Ideas:

- **Patterns:** Find something with an interesting pattern, like tiles, fabrics or shadows.
- **Close-Up Mystery:** Take a close-up photo of something small and let others guess what it is.
- **Colors of the Rainbow:** Find objects matching each color of the rainbow.
- **Emotion in Objects:** Snap a photo of an object or scene that makes you feel happy, calm or curious.
- **Seasonal Theme:** Find something that reminds you of winter, like a warm blanket or a frosty window.
- **Action Shot:** Snap a photo of something or someone in motion, like a pet running or a sibling dancing.
- **Nature Indoors:** Find something in your home that reminds you of nature, like a houseplant or a wood grain surface.
- **Family Favorites:** Take a picture of something that represents a family member's personality or hobby.



Friendly Fitness Contest

Turn your living room into a mini gym with challenges like planking, jumping jacks or push-ups. Let everyone take turns being the “coach,” calling out moves and setting timers.

Learn a Dance Routine

Learn a trending social media dance. It’s a great way to stay active, laugh and bond with family or friends. Include loved ones virtually by practicing the routine together online.



Something for the Whole Family

Snowflake Quesadillas

Ingredients: Whole-wheat tortillas, shredded cheese and veggie fillings (like diced peppers, onions, tomatoes or spinach).

Fold a tortilla in half and cut shapes into the edges, as if making paper snowflakes. Open the tortilla, sprinkle cheese and veggies on one half, and fold it back. Cook in a skillet over medium heat or bake in a 400°F oven until the cheese is melted.



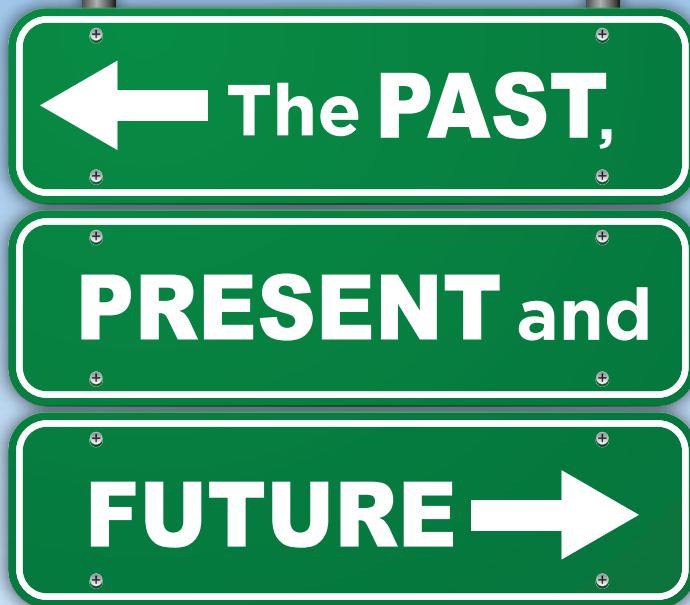
Spring Cleaning

Take some time to clean out closets, basements or attics as a family. Create three piles: donate, toss and keep. This is a great way to declutter and get a head start on spring cleaning while working together to organize your home and help others.

Winter days don’t have to feel gray when you fill them with creativity, movement and family fun. Whether it’s building a cozy pillow fort for story time, learning a trending dance or cooking up a batch of snowflake quesadillas for dinner, these simple activities bring warmth and laughter to the season and turn chilly days into cherished memories.

About the Author:

Michelle “Shelly” Vicari, OAC Senior Program Manager and Past OAC Chair, majored in Child Development and Family Studies as well as Political Science at San Diego State University. She was formerly the Curriculum Director at the largest Child Care Centers accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) in Southern California. She has authored numerous curriculum guides for teachers working with young children and was lucky enough to once meet Mr. Fred Rogers!



of Obesity Care

by Ted Kyle, RPh, MBA

Obesity is one of the most pressing health challenges of our time. Its prevalence has grown steadily over the past century, transforming from a rarity to a widespread global concern. Addressing it has been a winding journey – one that has evolved from simplistic solutions to a deeper, science-driven understanding of this complex condition. By examining the history, current state and future of obesity care, we can appreciate how far we've come and where we're headed.



“By examining the history, current state and future of obesity care, we can appreciate how far we've come and where we're headed.”

The History of Obesity Care

In the early 20th century, obesity was largely viewed as a moral failing or a sign of prosperity, not a medical condition. People with obesity were often told to simply “eat less and move more.” This oversimplified approach spawned countless diet fads, each promising miraculous weight loss results. From the grapefruit diet of the 1930s to the obsession with the low-carb Atkins diet at the end of the century, these fads reflected society’s obsession with quick fixes and often ignored the underlying drivers of obesity.

Meanwhile, the prevalence of obesity continued to climb. By the 1980s, it was clear to scientists that obesity was not just a matter of willpower. Researchers began uncovering biological factors that influence body weight. The discovery of leptin in 1994 marked a turning point. This hormone, produced by fat cells, helps regulate hunger and energy balance. Its discovery revealed that obesity is not just a behavioral issue but also a condition influenced by biology. Despite all of this new science, clinical care for obesity focused almost exclusively on advising patients to lose weight through diet and exercise. This emphasis created a perfect environment for a succession of faddish diets to flourish on the strength of unrealistic expectations for “fast and easy weight loss.”

In parallel, bariatric surgery emerged as a transformative option for individuals with severe obesity. Procedures like gastric bypass and sleeve gastrectomy provided effective and lasting weight loss for many patients. These surgeries also offered insights into how weight loss affects metabolic health, further challenging the simplistic “calories in, calories out” narrative. Despite these advancements, the stigma surrounding obesity persisted, and access to care remained limited.



“Despite growing awareness of obesity as a disease, individuals with obesity often encounter bias from healthcare providers, employers and society at large.”

The Current State of Obesity Care

Today, obesity care is in the midst of radical change. On one hand, our understanding of obesity has grown exponentially. It is now widely recognized as a complex, chronic disease influenced by genetics, environment and physiology. This shift in perspective has been bolstered by groundbreaking treatments like GLP-1 receptor agonists, including medications such as semaglutide and tirzepatide. Originally developed for diabetes, these drugs have demonstrated remarkable effectiveness in controlling obesity by reducing appetite and improving metabolic health. For many patients, these medicines are nothing short of life-changing.

In addition to the emergence of better science and better treatments for obesity, the elevation of lived experience with this disease has been a critical driver of the progress we are seeing. The Obesity Action Coalition has brought patient advocates into a central role for health policy relating to obesity. Patient advocates have done amazing work to put a spotlight on the prevalence and harm of weight bias. Without an appreciation for the lived experience of obesity, much of the progress today would not have been possible.

The patient voice is also responsible for scientific progress. For example, patients have brought attention to the phenomenon of “food noise” – which advanced obesity treatments have proven to be so effective for quieting.

However, significant challenges remain. Access to obesity care is far from equitable. Many health insurance plans do not cover obesity treatments, including medications and bariatric surgery, leaving millions without affordable options. This lack of access disproportionately impacts marginalized communities, exacerbating health disparities. For example, people in lower-income households or communities of color often face higher rates of obesity but fewer opportunities for effective care.

Stigma also continues to be a major barrier – as well as a source of harm. Despite growing awareness of obesity as a disease, individuals with obesity often encounter bias from healthcare providers, employers and society at large. This stigma can discourage people from seeking care and undermine the effectiveness of treatment. Addressing these systemic issues is essential for progress.

Past, Present & Future continued on page 34

“As we deepen our understanding of obesity, we may uncover entirely new ways of thinking about weight and health.”

The Future of Obesity Care

The future of obesity care is full of promise. Scientific advances are poised to deliver even more effective and diverse treatment options. Next-generation obesity medications are already in development, with the potential to offer even greater weight loss and fewer side effects. Innovations in gene therapy and personalized medicine may one day allow for highly tailored approaches based on an individual's unique biology.

Beyond treatment, the future will also see an emphasis on more effective strategies for prevention. Insights into the drivers of obesity, from early childhood nutrition to environmental factors, will inform better prevention strategies – strategies that can actually move the needle on prevalence. Schools, workplaces and communities will play a critical role in creating environments that support healthy lifestyles and reduce the risk of obesity.

Equally important is the need to scale up obesity care to match the scope of the problem. This means training more healthcare providers in obesity medicine, expanding insurance coverage and addressing stigma at every level. Public health initiatives must work hand-in-hand with medical advancements to ensure that care is accessible to all who need it.

Finally, as we deepen our understanding of obesity, we may uncover entirely new ways of thinking about weight and health. The concept of “health at every size” has already challenged traditional weight-centric approaches, emphasizing the importance of holistic well-being over arbitrary weight goals. Increasingly, obesity care is incorporating some of this perspective, focusing not just on weight loss but more on improving quality of life and reducing the health risks associated with obesity.

Conclusion

The journey of obesity care has been marked by significant progress, persistent challenges and boundless potential. From the diet fads of the past to today's advanced treatments, each step reflects our growing understanding of a condition that affects hundreds of millions worldwide. As we look to the future, the key to success will lie in embracing science, addressing systemic barriers and fostering a more compassionate and inclusive approach to care. By doing so, we can ensure that everyone can live a healthier, more fulfilling life – regardless of the challenges obesity presents.

About the Author:

Ted Kyle, RPh, MBA is a pharmacist and healthcare innovator living in Pittsburgh. He's also a tireless advocate for people living with obesity who served as the OAC Chair and on the Board of Directors for more than a decade. His widely-read daily commentary, published at [Conscienhealth.org/news](https://www.conscienhealth.org/news), reaches a diverse audience of thought leaders in health and obesity.



ARE YOU USING APPROPRIATE IMAGERY?

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Set it and Forget it: Healthy Winter Slow Cooker Recipes

by Sarah Muntel, RD

The days are getting cooler and shorter, signaling the season for warm, hearty meals. During the winter months, people often turn to soups, stews and casseroles as staples in their meal plans. There's nothing quite like coming home to a warm, comforting meal or enjoying the aroma of a hearty stew simmering all day.

What Are the Benefits of a Slow Cooker?

There are many benefits! First, on busy days, having a tasty, ready-to-eat meal waiting in the slow cooker is unbeatable. Slow cooker meals can also help you stick to your healthy eating plan. With just a little planning the night before, you can enjoy a nutritious meal the next day and avoid the temptation of fast food. Finally, slow cooker dishes can be a one-pot solution to meet all your nutritional needs. Protein, vegetables and grains can all come together in one delicious meal.



Slow Cooker Checklist:

- Choose recipes that fit your schedule. Cooking times typically range from four to eight hours, and many slow cookers come with timers for added convenience.
- Look for recipes with a variety of healthy ingredients. These may include lean proteins, vegetables, low-fat dairy and whole grains.
- Don't hesitate to substitute. Modify recipes to suit your needs. Add extra vegetables to soups, stews or casseroles. Swap out high-calorie ingredients like full-fat dairy for lower-fat alternatives, such as plain Greek yogurt instead of sour cream, or whole-grain options instead of white rice or pasta.
- Expand your options beyond dinner. Slow cookers are versatile and can be used for breakfast, lunch, dinner and even appetizers.

Breakfast

Breakfast is often called the most important meal of the day, and a healthy breakfast can set you off on the right foot. Since mornings can be hectic, slow cookers make things easier. Whether it's a busy workday, a sports-filled morning or a leisurely weekend, warm slow-cooked breakfasts are a great choice. Try hearty, whole-grain oats topped with fruit and yogurt or a protein-rich egg casserole loaded with vegetables.



Slow Cooker Steel Cut Oats

Recipe from *skinnytaste.com*

Ingredients:

- 1 cup quick-cooking steel-cut oats (e.g., Bob's Red Mill)
- 2 cups water
- 1 tbsp. pure maple syrup (plus extra for serving)
- ¼ tsp. cinnamon
- 1/3 cup egg whites
- 2 cups mixed fresh berries (e.g., blueberries, blackberries, raspberries)
- 1 medium ripe banana, sliced
- ¼ cup chopped pecans or walnuts

Directions:

1. Spray the slow cooker with oil to prevent sticking. Combine oats, water, maple syrup, cinnamon and egg whites. Stir to mix.
2. Add the berries and banana on top.
3. Cover and cook on low for two hours.
4. Serve with pecans and optional maple syrup.

Slow Cooker Recipes continued on page 38

Lunch and Dinner:

Slow cooker meals are game-changers for busy evenings. Take time to find a few family favorites to include in your weekly menu. These meals not only add variety but also save you hours during your busiest times of the day.



Crock Pot Enchilada Soup

Recipe from *delish.com*

Ingredients:

- ½ of an onion, finely chopped
- 1 tsp. chili powder
- 1 tsp. cumin
- 1 tsp. garlic powder
- 1 (19-oz) can red enchilada sauce
- 1 (28-oz) can fire-roasted diced tomatoes
- 1 (15-oz) can black beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 (15-oz) can corn, drained and rinsed
- 2 lbs. boneless, skinless chicken breasts, cut into thirds
- 2 ½ cups chicken broth
- 1/3 cup cheddar cheese (plus extra for serving)
- ¼ cup heavy cream

Directions:

1. Combine all ingredients except cheese and cream in the slow cooker. Stir to mix.
2. Cook on high for three hours or until the chicken is tender.
3. Remove chicken, shred and return it to the pot. Stir in cheese and cream until melted.
4. Serve with sour cream, crushed tortilla chips, lime slices and extra cheddar.

Appetizers and Dips:

Slow cookers are perfect for appetizers, whether for a casual afternoon at home or an evening gathering. Warm, flavorful dips are always a hit and require minimal effort.



Healthy Slow Cooker Spinach Artichoke Dip

Recipe from *tasty.com*

Ingredients:

- 8 oz. reduced-fat cream cheese
- ¼ cup nonfat Greek yogurt
- 2 cups canned artichoke hearts, drained and chopped
- 2 cups frozen spinach
- 1 cup low-fat mozzarella cheese

Directions:

1. Combine all ingredients in the slow cooker and stir until well mixed.
2. Cook on high for four hours or until the cheese is melted.
3. Serve and enjoy!

This winter, make meal prep easier with a variety of warm, hearty dishes your family will love. A slow cooker lets you save time in the kitchen while still serving nutritious, flavorful meals. From comforting stews and casseroles to protein-packed breakfasts and snacks, there's something for everyone!

With a little planning, you'll spend less time cooking and more time on what matters—whether it's enjoying family time, embracing winter activities or simply relaxing. Let your slow cooker do the work so you can focus on making the most of the season.

About the Author:

Sarah Muntel, RD is a registered dietitian who has worked with surgical and medical weight loss patients for more than 20 years. She loves helping people reach their health and wellness goals! In her free time, Sarah enjoys spending time with her husband and children, watching her children's activities and going on walks with friends.

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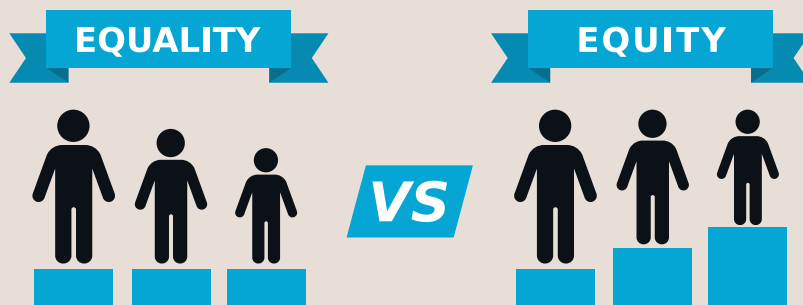
Health Equity and Obesity Care

by Tracy Zvenyach, PhD, MS, RN

Health inequity is a complicated topic. It happens when some people have a harder time being healthy because they don't have the same opportunities as others. For example, some people might not have access to healthy food, a nearby healthcare provider or a safe place to exercise and play. That's not fair, right? Everyone deserves the chance to be healthy.



“Health equity means creating fair and equal opportunities for everyone to live their healthiest lives.”



Health equity means creating fair and equal opportunities for everyone to live their healthiest lives. It involves addressing issues like poverty, discrimination and unfair policies that create obstacles. These barriers can make it harder for people to get healthcare, go to school, find jobs or live in safe places. All of these challenges can lead to worse health outcomes.

We often find health inequities in obesity care. Here are some examples:

- **Lack of Access:** Many people don't have healthcare providers trained in obesity medicine in their area. People with other common chronic diseases don't usually face the same geographic challenges.
- **Insurance Gaps:** Some health insurance plans completely exclude services and benefits for obesity treatments, even though treatments for other chronic diseases are covered.
- **Financial Barriers:** Many people can't afford treatment costs because insurance doesn't cover them, and there are no patient assistance programs to help with financial aid. For other chronic diseases, patient assistance programs are often available to make medications more affordable.
- **Unequal Coverage:** Health inequity is when one person's employer provides coverage for obesity treatments, but another person's doesn't because they work for a different company.

Health Equity continued on page 42

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Health Equity continued from page 41

The Role of Weight Stigma

Weight stigma also drives health inequities. It can impact the quality of care someone receives. Negative attitudes and beliefs from healthcare professionals may lead to poor treatment for people with obesity. This can cause stress, avoidance of care and mistrust of healthcare professionals, which all lead to worse health outcomes. Even with the best intentions, weight stigma reduces the quality of care for patients with obesity.

What is the Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) Doing to Help?

The OAC is working hard to improve health equity for people living with obesity.

- **Education and Support:** OAC provides free resources and a community to help people learn about obesity and find support.
- **Advocacy:** OAC fights for health policies that give everyone access to obesity care, including Medicare, Medicaid, private insurance, and care for veterans and military families.
- **Raising Awareness:** OAC leads campaigns to stop weight bias and stigma, like the Stop Weight Bias Campaign.
- **Tools for Patients:** OAC offers tools like an obesity care provider look-up tool where people can find doctors in their area who are trained in obesity care.
- **Scholarships:** OAC provides scholarship opportunities to attend our in-person events like the *Your Weight Matters* National Convention, and we've expanded our reach with Regional events to bring resources and support closer to communities.
- **Collaborations:** OAC collaborates with organizations across the United States and around the world, such as the Obesity Care Advocacy Network (OCAN) and the International Obesity Collaborative, to improve access to obesity care.

The Goal of Health Equity

Health equity means that a person's race, income, gender or location should not determine their health outcomes. Addressing health equity focuses on providing extra support and resources to those facing disadvantages so everyone has an equal opportunity to be their healthiest.

The OAC is committed to improving health equity for individuals with obesity, working to level the playing field so that everyone, regardless of their background or circumstances, can achieve their best health and live full, fulfilling lives.

About the Author:

Tracy Zvenyach, PhD, MS, RN is the Director of Policy Strategy and Alliances at the Obesity Action Coalition (OAC). In this role, she provides leadership in the development and implementation of policy priorities and strategy for OAC and represents OAC in alliances and coalition efforts to advance obesity care. She also serves as an Adjunct Assistant Professor at Georgetown University, where she teaches healthcare policy and advocacy to graduate students.

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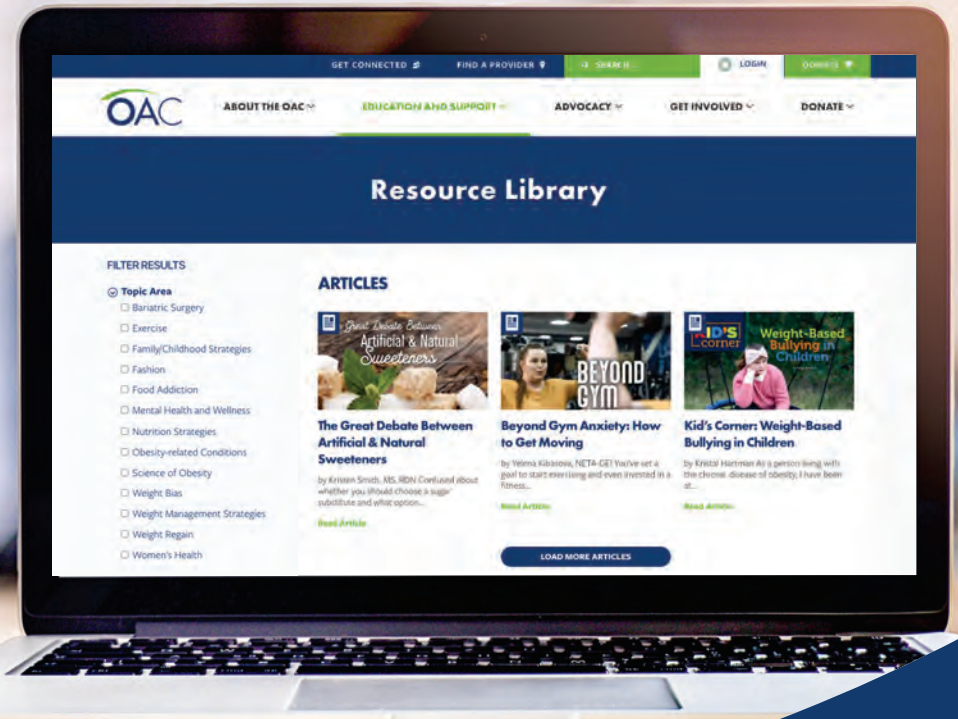
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