

Weight Matters

FOR YOUR HEALTH

WINTER 2026



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p.12 **GLP-1 Medications and Side Effects: What Patients Should Know**

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YOUR WEIGHT MATTERS NATIONAL CONVENTION

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Obesity Action Coalition

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Obesity Action Coalition
4511 North Himes Ave., Suite 250
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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](https://www.obesityaction.org/action-center/getting-started)) and OAC's Action Center ([ObesityAction.org/action](https://www.obesityaction.org/action)) to learn more and take action!

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Weight Matters

FOR YOUR HEALTH

Winter 2026 | Volume XXI | Issue 2

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.

Weight Matters Magazine is a quarterly publication published in Winter, Spring, Summer and Fall. A subscription to *Weight Matters Magazine* is a benefit to OAC members with Community+ Membership.

Opinions expressed by the authors are their own and do not necessarily reflect those of the OAC Board of Directors or staff. Information contained herein should not be construed as delivery of medical advice or care. The OAC recommends consultation with your doctor and/or healthcare professional.

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Message from the



Obesity Action Coalition

Chair of the Board

Beloved Community,

Happy 2026! Let me ask you something. “New year, new you!” Ever said that to yourself? I’m raising my hand right along with you. Here’s the thing: While a new year can be a chance to reevaluate your life, habits and health, last year’s challenges don’t always stay behind. They often follow us right into January.

Throughout the past few years, I’ve adopted a new mantra: progress, not perfection. Every step forward, big or small, moves you closer to the life you want. And on the days you forget that, don’t worry. Your OAC community is here with support and understanding. I’m so thankful you’re here.

In this issue of *Weight Matters Magazine*, you’ll find plenty of actionable information to help you start the year strong. From managing GLP-1 medication side effects to quieting a harsh inner voice and building resilience to keeping your iron levels on track, a forever resolution of mine, I hope these articles help you focus on the best next step in your personal health journey.

With love and gratitude,

Nikki Massie

Nikki Massie, MA
OAC Board Chair

P.S. The OAC offers so many ways to connect in person this year. Visit our website to find a regional event near you and make plans to join us at the *Your Weight Matters* National Convention in Orlando this summer. I hope I get to see you there. Learn more about OAC events at YourWeightMatters.events

Did you stumble on this copy?

If you’re not already part of the OAC Community, we’d love to have you join us! Membership is free and connects you with resources, education and support designed for people living with and impacted by obesity.

Want even more? Upgrade to Community+ and receive *Weight Matters Magazine* delivered right to your mailbox, along with other exclusive benefits.

Join Today!



ObesityAction.org/community

FDA Approves First Oral GLP-1 Pill for Weight Management

On December 22, 2025, the FDA approved oral semaglutide, the first GLP-1 pill for chronic weight management in people affected by the disease of obesity. Taken daily, it expands the range of evidence-based treatment options available beyond injectable therapies. The pill became available in January 2026, and access may vary by pharmacy and insurance coverage. OAC will continue advocating for fair, affordable access to comprehensive obesity care so that all people living with obesity can access the treatment options they need.



CMS Update: What to Know about the BALANCE Model

Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services recently announced the BALANCE Model, short for Better Approaches to Lifestyle and Nutrition for Comprehensive hEalth. This new initiative explores ways to expand access to obesity care for people enrolled in Medicare and Medicaid.

The voluntary model allows participating Medicare plans and state Medicaid programs to cover certain GLP-1 medications paired with evidence-based lifestyle and nutrition support. Participation is optional for manufacturers and plans, which means access will vary.

While many details are still being finalized, the BALANCE Model signals an important step toward improving access to evidence-based obesity care. OAC will continue to monitor this initiative and advocate for people living with obesity who rely on Medicare and Medicaid.

Your Weight Matters Events Bring Real Support to Communities Nationwide

YOURWEIGHTMATTERS REGIONAL

OAC's *Your Weight Matters* Regional Events are delivering free, in-person education and support to cities across the country. These half-day events feature guidance from leading experts in weight management, nutrition and mental health — all in a safe, welcoming and judgment-free setting. Attendees also enjoy a free breakfast and walk away with credible information and practical tools to support their health journey.

Designed to meet you where you are, these events deliver evidence-based strategies and resources to help you take charge of your weight and health with confidence. The first stops in 2026 are New Orleans, LA (2/7), Kansas City, MO (3/21), Portland, OR (4/18) and Minneapolis, MN (5/16). In the coming year, OAC will bring education and support to nine cities across the country. Learn more at YourWeightMatters.com and sign up to be the first to know when cities are announced.

Obesity Care Week

Join the Obesity Action Coalition as we prepare to lead Obesity Care Week from March 2–6, 2026! Obesity Care Week is a global initiative focused on changing how we think about and approach obesity through awareness, education and advocacy.



The 2026 theme, Commit to Care, highlights that everyone has a role to play, including individuals, healthcare professionals and policymakers. Together, we can help make obesity care more accessible, affordable and compassionate.

There are many ways to get involved throughout the week, from taking the pledge to sharing resources and spreading the word on social media. Each action helps show how you #CommitToCare. Sign up for campaign alerts at ObesityCareWeek.org/ocw-alerts.

Perspectives



Finding Hope Again through Thrive Together

by Jess Perreca Jr.



Thrive
Together

OAC'S Youth and Families Program

**"Healing starts when we feel
safe enough to thrive."**

Coming Back to a Place I Belong

I came to the 2025 *Your Weight Matters* National Convention because I needed a reset. I first attended an OAC National Convention in 2018 in Denver, and it stayed with me. That weekend gave me something I did not often feel at the time: connection. I belonged. Coming back this year, I felt both excited and nervous. I knew I would see familiar faces and meet new ones. More than anything, I wanted to return to a space where I did not have to explain myself, a place where people understood me without judgment and believed in me. That is exactly what I found again. And this time, something else stayed with me in a deeper way.

Watching Thrive Together

The OAC's Thrive Together program for teens stood out right away. The kids connected quickly, almost naturally. Watching them felt like watching a younger version of myself, surrounded by peers who understood what it meant to live in a larger body and move through the world that way. It brought me back to the rare moments in my own childhood when I felt accepted and supported. Those moments mattered more than I knew at the time. Seeing Thrive Together teens experience that kind of belonging made me smile.

Then came the Saturday Night Gala. During the Gala, several teens took the microphone and shared what Thrive Together meant to them. In just a few minutes, my emotions shifted. I felt proud and happy for them, but I also felt a deep sadness rise up. They had something I wanted so badly as a kid, something I once had myself and something I lost.

A Memory that Stayed with Me

When I was about 10 or 11, I read a newspaper article about a man in my community who had lost more than 600 pounds. He had started a program for kids like me. I remember bringing the article to my parents in tears and begging them to help me get involved. They did. I became part of the program and lost nearly 60 pounds. More importantly, I felt seen. I felt supported. I felt hopeful for the first time.

Then one day, the program ended. The support disappeared. The community faded away. I felt abandoned. I struggled emotionally and physically and gained the weight back and more. That experience stayed with me. I have often wondered how different my life might have been if that sense of connection had lasted longer.

Why Thrive Together Felt Different

That is why Thrive Together hit me so hard. It felt familiar, but also different in important ways. Thrive is not built around one person. It is thoughtful and intentional. The kids had space to talk openly, learn from one another and simply be themselves. Parents were included too, which mattered deeply. When I was a kid, our parents were not part of the experience. Seeing that made me hopeful, not because it promised quick change, but because it showed commitment. It showed that the OAC is building something meant to last.

What It Sparked in Me

Seeing the Thrive Together program reminded me how powerful it can be to simply show up and share your story. I may not have all the answers, but I do have lived experience. I know what it feels like to be full of hope and to feel that hope slip away. Being part of the OAC community allows me to turn those experiences into something meaningful by showing up, listening and staying connected.

To the Thrive teens, I want you to know this: your voices matter. Your stories matter. Sharing them helped me heal a part of my own.

A Place to Belong

At the 2025 National Convention, I saw hope take shape in a new way. I saw kids and parents building connections. I saw a community that shows up and stays. I saw young people who knew they belonged. If you are struggling or feeling alone, please know this. You do not have to do it by yourself. There is a community here. Most of all, there is a place where you belong. Healing starts when we feel safe enough to thrive.

About the Author:

Jess Perreca Jr. lives in Michigan and is a husband, father and OAC Community Member who shares his personal health journey with honesty and heart. He is passionate about connection, compassion, and helping others feel seen and supported within the community.

About Thrive Together:

Thrive Together is a youth and family program created by the Obesity Action Coalition to support teens and parents affected by weight and health challenges. The program focuses on connection, shared experiences and learning together in a space that feels welcoming and supportive. Families can stay connected beyond events by signing up for the Thrive Together newsletter, which shares stories from the community, helpful resources, upcoming opportunities and ways to stay involved throughout the year. To learn more or sign up, visit ObesityAction.org/thrive-together.



Donate to Thrive Together



PUTTING OUR MISSION INTO MOTION

Every initiative we lead is rooted in our commitment to uplift and support individuals affected by obesity.



Thrive Together
Empowering youth and families with resources to thrive

STOP WEIGHT BIAS

Challenging weight bias and pushing equality forward



OAC ACTION

Mobilizing advocates to create change

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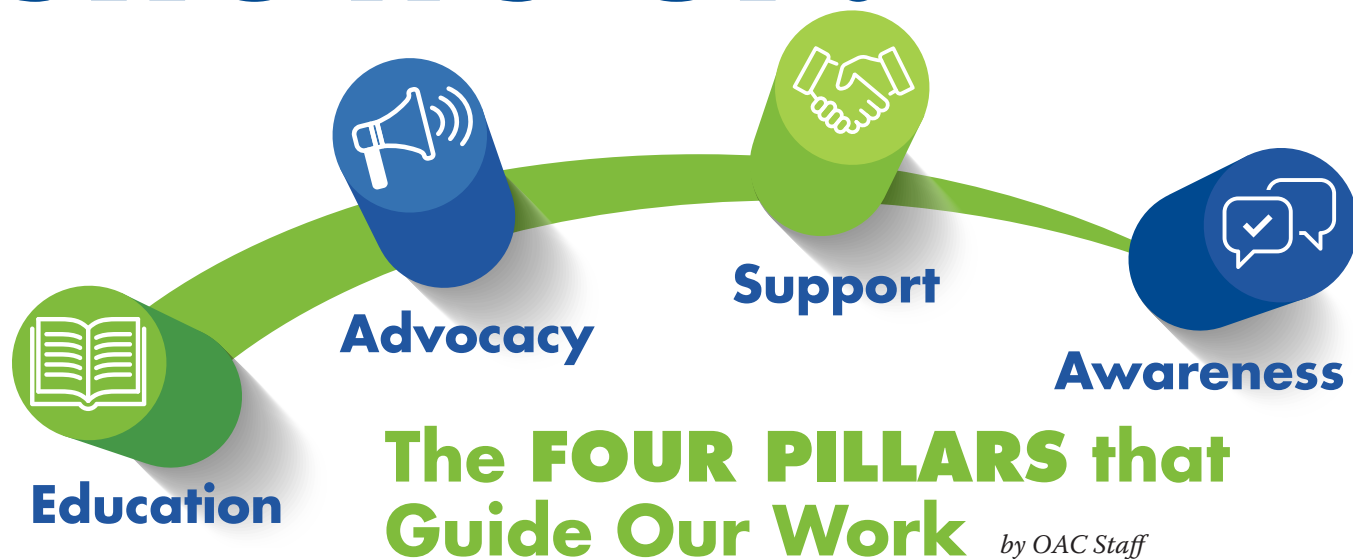


Helping individuals start the conversation about weight with a healthcare provider

... And that's not all.
Explore more at
ObesityAction.org



HOW OAC SHOWS UP:



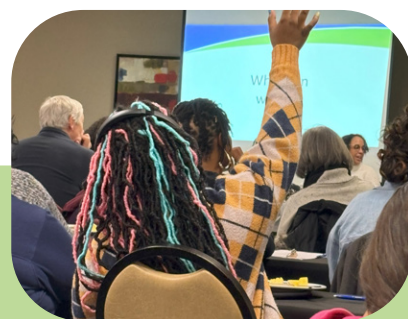
At the Obesity Action Coalition (OAC), our work is guided by a simple belief: people deserve trustworthy information, respectful care, and meaningful support. Everything we do is shaped by four pillars: education, advocacy, support and awareness. These pillars are not abstract ideas. They show up in real ways through our programs, resources and events designed to meet people where they are.



EDUCATION: Clear, Trusted Information You Can Use

Education is often the first way people connect with OAC, and it remains at the heart of our work. When it comes to weight and health, information can feel confusing or hard to trust. OAC exists to share clear, science-based education that reflects real lives and real challenges.

Our education takes many forms because people learn in different ways. Some begin by reading articles in *Weight Matters Magazine* or watching a Health Talk that breaks down complex topics into plain language. Education also happens in person. OAC hosts Regional Events across the country that bring half-day programs closer to home, making it easier to attend without long travel or high costs. Our National Convention brings people together for several days of education and shared experience. Individuals, families, advocates and health care professionals gather in one place to learn from experts and from one another.



“I went to a Regional Event not knowing what to expect and it was awesome. I loved the speakers, and the information felt useful in a way I could actually work into my life right away.”
— Regional Event Attendee



ADVOCACY:

Real Voices Making Change

Advocacy is a core part of OAC's work. It is how real experiences help create change and expand access to care and treatment. While advocacy is often tied to politics, at OAC it starts with everyday life. Our focus is improving access to obesity care, reducing weight bias and increasing understanding that obesity is a chronic disease. This includes national efforts like Obesity Care Week, the Stop Weight Bias campaign and ongoing education for policymakers about the barriers people face when seeking care.

Advocacy does not look the same for everyone, and that is OK. For some, it means sharing their personal story or taking action through the OAC Action Center. For others, it may mean speaking up during a health care visit, joining awareness efforts or staying informed through newsletters. Some people engage publicly. Others participate in quieter ways. All of these approaches matter.



“Reach out to OAC. They provide excellent resources. Start with emails, and as you gain confidence, you can call your local and state representatives. Every action counts. Advocacy is powerful, and once you start, it becomes contagious. You want to do more.”
— Cherie, OAC community member

How OAC Shows Up continued on page 10

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Gold: \$50,000 - \$99,999 Patron: \$1,000 - \$4,999
Silver: \$10,000 - \$49,999

List as of 1/21/2026



SUPPORT: You Don't Have to Navigate This Alone

Support is woven into everything OAC offers. Living with obesity can feel isolating, especially in a world that often misunderstands it. OAC works to create spaces where people feel seen, respected and understood.

Support looks different depending on what someone needs. For some, it means finding comfort in reading stories from others with similar experiences. For others, it may be learning how to navigate difficult conversations with family members, employers or health care providers. Support can also mean helping people better understand their options and rights when seeking care.

OAC's support is grounded in respect. It centers listening, understanding and making space for people to move through their health journey in ways that feel right for them. Our resources reflect real life, including the emotional and social sides of health, not just the physical. Support also extends to families and caregivers. Helping loved ones better understand obesity can reduce blame, strengthen relationships and create more compassionate spaces at home, at work and in health care settings.



“The OAC community has been a huge part of my support system since I was first introduced to it in 2019. From in-person and virtual conventions to the year-round connections I have made with incredible people, I always feel a sense of belonging.” — Anita, OAC community member



AWARENESS: Changing the Conversation

Awareness brings OAC's work into the broader world. It is about changing how obesity is understood, talked about and treated. Through awareness, OAC works to challenge myths, reduce stigma and replace blame with understanding.

Awareness shows up through national campaigns, media outreach, educational tools and social storytelling that elevate real experiences. It also happens in everyday moments, like sharing an article, correcting misinformation or choosing more respectful language. By increasing awareness, OAC helps create environments where people affected by obesity are met with compassion rather than judgment.

This pillar supports the others by opening doors. Awareness helps people find education they can trust, understand why advocacy matters and recognize the importance of support. It helps families, employers, health care providers and policymakers see obesity more clearly and respond more thoughtfully.

How the Pillars Work Together

Each pillar plays an important role on its own, but their real strength comes from how they work together. Education helps people feel informed and empowered. Advocacy works to improve systems and access. Support creates space for understanding. Awareness expands understanding and changes attitudes. Many people connect with OAC through one pillar and discover others over time.

It Starts With Joining the Community

Everything OAC offers is rooted in connection. Joining the OAC community is the first step to staying informed, supported and engaged in ways that fit your life. Membership is free and open to anyone who wants to learn, stay connected or feel less alone.

Whether you read an article, attend an event or quietly follow along on social media, being part of the OAC community keeps you connected to education, advocacy, support and growing awareness. You can learn more and join at ObesityAction.org/join. Wherever you are on your journey, OAC is here to show up with you.



**Join the
OAC Community!**

Presented by **OAC**
Obesity Action Coalition

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Information from
Trusted Experts



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information about
your weight
and health?



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MEDICATIONS AND SIDE EFFECTS:

What Patients Should Know

by Anthony J. Millard, MD

What are GLP-1s and how do they work?

GLP-1 medicines have become more common in recent years, but they have been used for about 20 years. GLP-1 is a hormone the body makes naturally, but it only works for a short time. GLP-1 medicines are designed to act like this hormone while lasting longer in the body.

For people with diabetes, GLP-1 helps the body recognize when blood sugar is too high. It supports the release of insulin to lower blood sugar without causing it to drop too low. Researchers have also learned that GLP-1 affects parts of the brain that control hunger. Weekly injectable GLP-1 medicines such as semaglutide or tirzepatide, which also works on a hormone called GIP, can help people feel full sooner, think about food less often and have fewer cravings. These effects can support long-term weight loss.

Why side effects can happen

No medicine offers only benefits. GLP-1 medicines can cause side effects and this is one reason some people stop taking them. Data published in the journal *Obesity* shows that slightly more than 50% of patients stop using semaglutide or tirzepatide for obesity treatment within a year. A common reason for stopping is side effects, which are often related to the stomach and digestion. These can include nausea, vomiting, constipation and/or diarrhea.

Side effects happen because GLP-1 affects more than one area of the body. Nausea is linked to how GLP-1 works in a part of the brain that is separate from appetite control. When nausea is strong, it can lead to vomiting. Experts are still learning why GLP-1s can cause diarrhea, but possible reasons include changes in how food moves through the gut or how the stomach and intestines communicate with each other.



Constipation may also happen, often because people eat less while taking these medicines. Eating less means there is less waste for the body to move through the intestines. Fewer bowel movements are usually not a problem unless they cause symptoms such as abdominal pain, bloating, cramping or nausea.

How food choices can affect side effects

Nausea while taking a GLP-1 can be linked to what you eat or how much you eat. High-fat foods are often the first foods to limit. These can include foods that are fried or high in oil, cheese or butter, such as burgers, pizza or fries. They can also include ice cream or other dairy products with higher fat content, such as 2%–4% fat, as well as healthier fats found in foods like salmon, avocado or nuts.



This does not mean these foods must be avoided completely, especially healthier fats. However, if nausea is a problem, it can help to look closely at whether any of these foods are making symptoms worse.

Portion size and eating pace matter

Portion size plays an important role in how your body responds to a GLP-1. A common starting point is to cut portions in half compared with what you are used to eating. If nausea continues and does not seem related to the type of food, eating an even smaller portion may help.



Eating slowly can also make a difference. Taking about 15–20 minutes to eat a meal gives your body time to notice when you are full. You can always eat a little more if you are still hungry. Eating too much or too quickly can lead to nausea or other discomfort. Finding the right portion size and eating pace can help limit side effects and make it easier to stay on the medicine long enough to see its full benefits.

Balancing benefits and side effects

For some people, side effects may be a reason not to use a medicine. For others, the benefits may be strong enough to weigh against the side effects, especially when those side effects can be managed with guidance from a health care provider. This is how GLP-1 obesity medications should be considered.



These medicines can help people manage excess weight in ways that may have felt out of reach before. Weight loss and long-term weight management may also help improve other health conditions. The benefits of medicines like semaglutide and tirzepatide can be significant. However, the first goal is making sure each person can tolerate the medicine. Without that, the benefits are often harder to achieve.



Using dose adjustments to reduce side effects



Another way to limit side effects is to increase the dose slowly over time. This gives the body more time to adjust to the medicine. If a lower dose works well and does not cause side effects, there may be no need to increase it.

Semaglutide and tirzepatide are taken once a week. People usually stay on the same dose for at least four weeks so the body can adjust. Some people do well on a certain dose and may stay there longer. Health care providers focus on finding the lowest dose that works with few or no side effects and keeping that dose as long as it continues to help.

What progress can look like

There is no single pace of weight loss that is right for everyone. Progress can look different from person to person. A helpful way to judge whether a GLP-1 medicine is working is to notice changes such as thinking about food less often, feeling full sooner and having fewer cravings. Weight loss may range from about two pounds per month to two pounds per week depending on your life situation, medical history and personal goals.

GLP-1 Medications continued on page 14

A more personalized approach

Another way to reduce side effects is called flexible titration. This means increasing the dose more slowly than usual. Using semaglutide as an example, standard dosing starts at 0.25 mg per week and increases every four weeks. In one study from Israel, researchers compared this standard schedule with a slower increase that took 16 weeks to reach a 1 mg dose.

People who followed the slower increase had fewer side effects. At the same time, improvements in blood sugar levels and weight loss were similar in both groups. This approach is considered off-label and is only possible with certain delivery systems. However, it shows how a more personalized dosing plan may help more people tolerate obesity medications over the long term.

Managing side effects when they persist

Medicines to help with nausea, such as ondansetron, or treatments for constipation or diarrhea may be used when needed. However, many patients and health care providers prefer to avoid adding more medicines when possible.

If side effects continue, switching to a different weekly injectable option may help. Some people tolerate one medicine better than another. Older but still effective obesity medications may also be an option. For some individuals, metabolic or bariatric surgery, such as gastric sleeve, gastric bypass or endoscopic sleeve procedures, may be appropriate. Using medication before or after surgery or endoscopy is another possible approach. A board-certified obesity medicine specialist can help create a plan based on a person's medical history and goals. You can find a provider who specializes in obesity care at [ObesityCareProviders.com](https://www.obesitycareproviders.com).

Looking ahead: What's next in obesity treatment?

It is possible that the right treatment is not available yet. The future looks promising as research continues and new options become available. For people who have not found the right fit, new obesity medications offer real hope.

In December 2025, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration approved the first GLP-1 pill for obesity. It is taken once a day and is expected to be available in 2026. Studies showed that people taking the pill lost a significant amount of weight, similar to results seen with weekly injections.

Other daily GLP-1 pills are still being reviewed and may become available in the future. New weekly and monthly injectable medicines are also being studied. These options may give people more choices and make treatment easier to fit into daily life in ways that feel more manageable and realistic.



“There is no single pace of weight loss that is right for everyone.”

June 2026 will mark five years since GLP-1 medications were approved for obesity and overweight. This early period will likely be remembered with both excitement and frustration. Many people have seen meaningful progress and improvements in their health, while others have faced real challenges. Some have struggled with high costs or limited insurance coverage, which can put treatment out of reach.

The Obesity Action Coalition is working to address these barriers and support people living with obesity. Looking ahead, new treatment options and growing experience among healthcare providers may help improve access and affordability. With many new options in development, the chances of finding a treatment that works well for you continue to grow.

WHEN TO CALL YOUR PROVIDER

- ✓ You have severe side effects that interfere with your ability to get through your day
- ✓ You have not noticed any benefit after 3–4 weeks at a dose and do not have instructions on when to increase it

About the Author:

Anthony J. Millard, MD, is board-certified in internal medicine and obesity medicine. Previously on staff at the University of Colorado and Northwestern Medicine in Chicago, he is exploring his next role in patient care. In the meantime, he shares evidence-based content on weight management on Instagram at [@drtonymillard](https://www.instagram.com/drtonymillard).



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IRON IT OUT! WAYS TO ENERGIZE YOUR PLATE

by Julie Schwartz, MS, RDN, LD, ACSM-EP, NBC-HWC

We have all heard that iron is important for our bodies, but what does it actually do for us? At the top of the list, iron helps energize us. It plays a key role in many body functions and is essential for blood health.

When we eat iron-rich foods, a small amount is absorbed in the intestines and stored in the liver. The body releases iron as needed to make new red blood cells. Iron's main role is producing hemoglobin, which transports oxygen throughout the body in red blood cells. That oxygen allows our cells to produce energy. Iron also helps remove carbon dioxide, a byproduct of energy production.

Without enough energy, it can be hard to participate in daily activities, both the things we need to do and the things we enjoy. Iron is also necessary for:

- A healthy immune system
- muscles
- cells
- skin
- hair
- nails

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE DO NOT GET ENOUGH IRON?

When the body's iron stores drop too low, hemoglobin levels fall and red blood cells cannot carry oxygen efficiently. This can affect strength, stamina, hair, skin and nails. The immune system may also struggle, making it harder for the body to fight infection.



SIGNS OF IRON DEFICIENCY

Low iron levels can lead to iron deficiency anemia. Common symptoms include unexplained fatigue, low energy, weakness and difficulty maintaining body temperature.

Other symptoms may include:

- Pale or yellowish skin
- Brittle or spoon-shaped fingernails
- Hair loss
- Dizziness or lightheadedness
- Headaches
- Shortness of breath or chest pain, especially with activity
- A pounding or “whooshing” sound in the ears
- A sore, smooth or swollen tongue
- Cravings for ice or dirt

Children may experience poor appetite and lethargy when they are anemic. Early detection is important for healthy growth and development.

WHO IS AT RISK?

Low iron intake is most concerning for young children, people who menstruate, especially those with heavy periods and pregnant individuals.

People with overweight or obesity may also be at higher risk due to chronic inflammation and increased levels of hepcidin, a hormone that limits iron absorption in the intestines. More research is needed in this area, but it may be another reason to follow anti-inflammatory eating and lifestyle habits.

Additional risk groups include:

- People who have had bariatric surgery, especially gastric bypass or biliopancreatic diversion with duodenal switch, also known as BPD-DS
- People who have undergone major surgery or physical trauma
- People with gastrointestinal conditions such as celiac disease, ulcerative colitis or Crohn disease
- People with peptic ulcer disease
- People using long-term acid-reducing medications
- People who follow vegetarian or vegan eating patterns or whose diets lack iron-rich foods
- Children who drink more than 16 to 24 ounces of cow’s milk per day. Cow’s milk contains little iron and can interfere with iron absorption and irritate the intestinal lining, leading to chronic blood loss

WHO CAN HELP IF YOU SUSPECT IRON DEFICIENCY?

If you have symptoms or think you may have iron deficiency anemia, your health care provider can assess your iron status and determine whether changes in diet or supplements are needed. It is important to talk with a physician or registered dietitian nutritionist before starting iron supplements. Some symptoms of iron deficiency overlap with other conditions, and supplementing without guidance can mask the real issue.

Blood tests, often part of annual wellness visits, may include a complete blood count, hemoglobin, hematocrit, serum ferritin, iron, total iron-binding capacity or transferrin.

With this information, your healthcare provider and RDN can work with you to develop a personalized plan to restore iron stores and energy levels. They will consider your usual eating pattern, food preferences, supplements and lifestyle to create a plan that fits your needs.

FOOD SOURCES OF IRON

Iron comes in two forms: heme and non-heme. Animal foods such as lean meat, seafood and poultry provide both forms and are more easily absorbed by the body. Non-heme iron is found in plant foods like lentils, beans, dark leafy greens, nuts and iron-fortified grains and cereals.

Eating vitamin C-rich foods, including citrus fruits, tomatoes, kiwi, strawberries and bell peppers, can help increase iron absorption.

Tannins occur naturally in foods and beverages and affect taste and mouthfeel. While tannins may offer some health benefits, they can interfere with the absorption of non-heme iron. Foods and beverages high in tannins include tea, coffee, chocolate and unripe fruit. To support iron absorption, pair iron-rich foods with vitamin C and limit tannin-rich foods at the same meal.

FOODS HIGH IN IRON

Animal sources:

- Lean red meat
- Chicken thigh and other dark meat poultry



Plant sources:

- Lentils and beans
- Tofu
- Spinach and other dark leafy greens
- Edamame
- Nuts and seeds



Fortified foods:

- Iron-fortified cereals
- Iron-fortified breads and grains



Iron continued on page 18

Iron continued from page 17

HOW MUCH IRON DO YOU NEED?

Recommended dietary allowances vary by age and sex:

- 7–12 months: 11 mg
- Ages 1–3: 7 mg
- Ages 4–8: 10 mg
- Ages 9–13: 8 mg
- Ages 14–18: 11 mg for males, 15 mg for females
- Ages 19–50: 8 mg for males, 18 mg for females
- Age 51 and older: 8 mg

WHAT IF SUPPLEMENTS ARE NEEDED?

The amount of iron needed to treat deficiency is usually higher than what is found in standard multivitamins. Supplement type and dose should be individualized based on lab results and health history.

Iron supplements are typically taken once daily. If you take antacids, iron should be taken two hours before or four hours after. Vitamin C improves absorption, and some providers recommend taking iron with vitamin C-rich foods or a vitamin C supplement. Side effects may include stomach discomfort, nausea, constipation, diarrhea and dark stools.

Avoid calcium-rich foods or supplements for two hours before and after taking iron to optimize absorption.

People who have had metabolic or bariatric surgery, especially gastric bypass or BPD-DS, are often advised to supplement iron for life due to changes in absorption. Follow your health care team's guidance and have annual nutrition labs checked.

In rare cases, iron infusions may be necessary. Your healthcare provider can help determine the best approach.

FITTING IRON-RICH FOODS INTO YOUR DAY

When focusing on iron intake, choose foods you enjoy and that support your vision of health and well-being. Keep in mind that dark meat contains more iron than light meat and iron content varies by serving size. Check labels and choose iron-fortified grains when possible.

About the Author:

Julie Schwartz, MS, RDN, LD, ACSM-EP, NBC-HWC, is an award-winning registered dietitian nutritionist and health and wellbeing coach known for her thoughtful, people-centered approach to weight management and obesity care. Recognized with the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics' Medallion Award, Julie blends nutrition, fitness and coaching to help individuals build confidence, find balance and create sustainable changes that support long-term health.



SAMPLE IRON-RICH MENUS:

Breakfast

- Two eggs with sautéed mushrooms, spinach and peppers, whole grain toast and grapefruit slices (4.5–5 mg)
- One to two boiled eggs with oatmeal, toasted walnuts and berries (3.4–4.3 mg)

Lunch

- Spinach salad with peppers, mushrooms, strawberries and chicken thigh with vinaigrette (5.2 mg)
- Veggie burger with spinach and tomato on pumpernickel bread with sliced kiwi (5 mg)

Dinner

- Three ounces of sirloin with roasted Brussels sprouts and a baked potato with skin (6.9 mg)
- Tofu stir-fry with vegetables, toasted cashews and brown rice (6.5 mg)

Snacks

- One cup salted edamame (3.5 mg)
- One-quarter cup almonds or pistachios (1.3 mg)
- Hummus with vegetables for dipping (1.1 mg)

LEARN MORE

For additional information on iron and iron-rich foods, visit the USDA dietary guidelines <https://www.dietaryguidelines.gov/resources/2020-2025-dietary-guidelines-online-materials/food-sources-select-nutrients/food-sources-iron>

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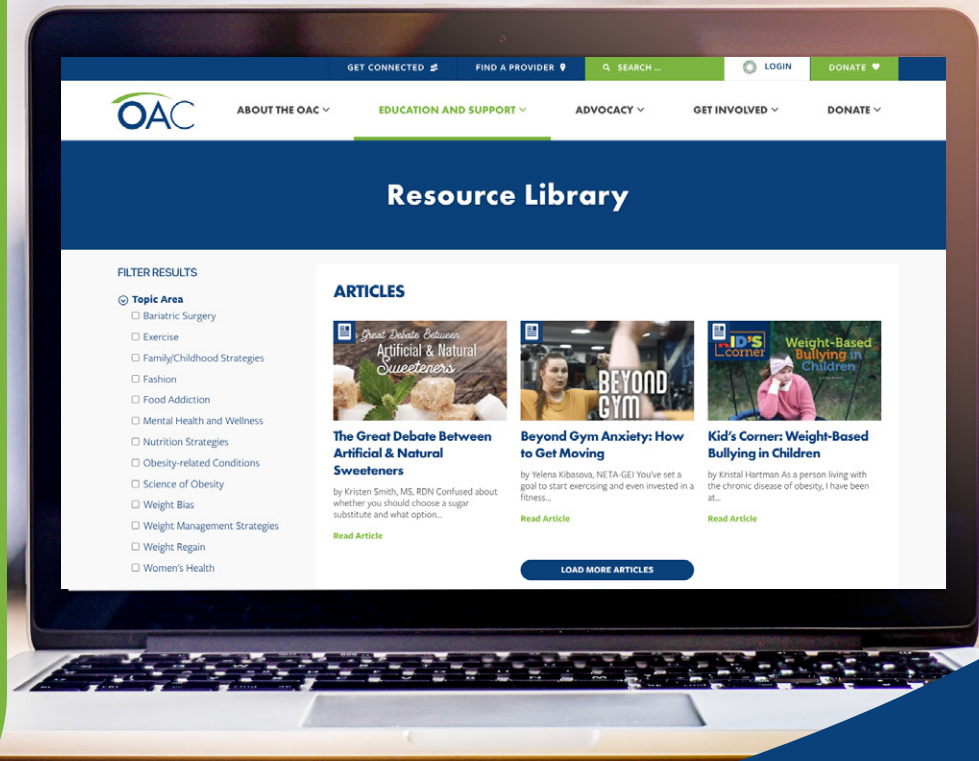
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Rewriting YOUR INNER VOICE

*By Nanette Wilson Adams, LPC, LMHC and
Michele Tedder, MSN, RN, BCC*

Internalized weight bias affects both how we think and how we care for our health. In this article, a psychotherapist and a nurse share two connected perspectives. One focuses on the inner dialogue that shapes emotions and behavior, while the other looks at how those beliefs show up in health care, follow-through and long-term well-being.

The Weight of Our Thoughts

PSYCHOTHERAPIST PERSPECTIVE:

Internalized weight bias is made up of negative thoughts, beliefs and behaviors we turn inward because of weight. From a psychotherapist's perspective, it often shows up in how people talk to themselves. These inner messages quietly shape how we interact with health care, school, work, media and relationships. Most of all, they shape the way we speak to ourselves each day.

In therapy, it is common to see how one small thought can set off a chain reaction. A simple "I can't" may turn into "I don't," "I won't," "I haven't," and eventually "I don't care." This spiral can feel overwhelming and may stop people from taking steps toward their health goals.

Resilience helps interrupt that pattern. In therapy, resilience means learning to gently redirect thoughts toward what you want, even when things feel hard. It is a shift toward a different inner story, one based on effort and intention instead of judgment. Thoughts like "I am doing my best," "I am taking steps," or "I can move forward in my own way" can help create that shift.

Psychotherapy gives people space to explore what drives their choices and the pressures that shape daily life. When these inner conversations are brought into the open, they can be reshaped into something more supportive and kind.

Understanding Internalized Weight Bias: How It Shows Up

PSYCHOTHERAPIST PERSPECTIVE:

Internalized weight bias often develops quietly. It can sound like a harsh inner voice, show up as pulling away from activities, or appear as constant comparison with others. Sometimes it is subtle, like skipping social events, avoiding mirrors, or worrying about what others might think about your body.

Over time, these patterns can become automatic. Some people avoid medical appointments because they expect stigma. Others speak to themselves in ways they would never speak to a friend. Replaying perceived flaws again and again can shape how people see themselves and make those thoughts feel like facts.

The first step toward change is awareness without judgment. This means noticing when the inner critic shows up, naming it, and gently redirecting your thoughts instead of criticizing yourself for having them.



Tip: Soften Your Inner Voice

When a harsh thought shows up, pause and ask yourself a few simple questions. Would I say this to someone I love? Is this thought helping me move toward my goals? What is a kinder and more realistic way to say this to myself?

Another helpful strategy is to separate yourself from the inner critic. Giving it a name or thinking of it as a separate voice can create distance and compassion instead of judgment. For example, saying “That perfectionist voice is back” can feel more helpful than saying “I’m such a failure.”

Neutral language can help too. Instead of “I’m undisciplined,” try “I noticed I did not follow through today.” This small shift makes space for problem-solving rather than shame.



Tip: Talk to Yourself Like a Trusted Friend

Imagine this situation happening to someone you deeply care about. The tone you would use with them, honest and kind, is the tone your inner voice deserves. When we judge ourselves less harshly, the hold of internalized weight bias begins to ease. This approach does not ignore challenges. It helps create an inner space that supports growth.



“Internalized weight bias often shows up most clearly in the way people talk to themselves.”



Inner Voice continued on page 22



Shifting from Inner Dialogue to Healthcare Experiences

Internalized weight bias does not stop at thoughts and emotions. It also affects how people experience medical care. The next section shifts to a nurse's perspective, focusing on how these beliefs influence appointments, follow-through and how progress is measured.

NURSE PERSPECTIVE:

From a nursing perspective, internalized weight bias affects both emotional well-being and medical outcomes. Some patients skip follow-ups because of shame. Others view setbacks as personal failures rather than part of a learning process. Many people minimize or dismiss meaningful progress simply because it does not match a specific number on the scale. The scale is only one tool and tells just a fraction of the story. When that number becomes the sole focus, important signs of improved health and resilience may be overlooked.

Internalized bias can quietly interfere with treatment adherence, physical healing and the willingness to seek support. Recognizing this is not about blame. It is about creating space for compassionate and effective care, which includes broadening how success is measured.

Use Whole Health Indicators, Not Just the Scale

The scale is only one way to measure health and it does not tell the full story. Many meaningful changes can happen even when weight stays the same.

Look for progress such as:

- Moving more easily
- Having more energy during daily activities
- Sleeping better
- Improved blood pressure, blood sugar or lab results
- Needing less medication or more stable doses
- Less digestive discomfort
- Feeling more comfortable at medical appointments
- Changes in how clothes fit, used as neutral information

The number on the scale can change because of hydration, hormones, medication and time of day. Looking at physical, medical and emotional changes gives a more accurate picture of health.

Track Non-scale Wins

Write down small changes, such as climbing stairs with less effort or cooking a nourishing meal. When progress is measured in more than one way, follow-ups feel less intimidating and staying engaged with care becomes easier.



Rewriting the Narrative

NURSE PERSPECTIVE:

Missed check-ins and plan changes are common and expected in health care. Life happens, and care plans are meant to be flexible, not perfect. Waiting for the perfect moment to restart often increases stress and delay.

If a goal no longer fits daily life, that does not mean failure. It means the plan needs to change. Open communication with a provider allows adjustments that better match energy, schedule and needs. Progress comes from ongoing communication and small course corrections, not from rigid plans.

Resilience as a Health Tool

PSYCHOTHERAPIST PERSPECTIVE:

In therapy, mistakes are treated as information, not as personal failure. When missteps are expected and talked about openly, they lose the power to define someone. Resilience means learning from what did not work instead of judging yourself for it. A thought like “I had a hard day, but I can try again tomorrow” helps people stay engaged rather than give up.

NURSE PERSPECTIVE:

In medical care, resilience shows up as flexibility and follow-through. Health goals should be realistic and compassionate. When setbacks occur, such as missed meals, unplanned indulgences, skipped activity or plateaus, resilience means adjusting rather than abandoning care.



Three Simple Ways to Practice Resilience Today

- Reframe one thought. Change “I can’t” to “I’m learning to.”
- Celebrate one healthy action, no matter how small.
- Write one kind sentence to yourself.

Bringing Both Perspectives Together

Lasting change happens when emotional and physical health are supported together. Therapy helps shift inner dialogue, while nursing care helps adjust plans and recognize progress. When these approaches work side by side, resilience becomes easier to build and sustain.

Internalized weight bias does not disappear overnight, but change begins by noticing how we speak to ourselves. Our thoughts shape our actions, and our actions shape our future. Choosing a kinder inner voice allows us to move forward with care, intention and self-respect.

About the Authors:

Nanette Wilson Adams, LPC, LMHC, is a psychotherapist who helps individuals identify and reframe internalized weight bias to support mental and emotional well-being. She serves on the Obesity Action Coalition Mental Health Committee.

Michele Tedder, MSN, RN, BCC, is a nurse and health coach who works with patients to build sustainable and compassionate approaches to managing chronic conditions and lifestyle change. She serves on the Obesity Action Coalition National Board of Directors.

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INNER STRENGTH

by Rylan Rosario, MA, CMCH

Being a teen today comes with a lot of pressure. You are juggling school, friendships, dating, family expectations and social media. On top of that, you are constantly surrounded by messages telling you who to be, how to act and what you should look like. During a time of change, exploration and self-discovery, all of this can feel overwhelming.

When setbacks happen, like harsh comments, unexpected challenges or moments of self-doubt, it is easy to feel discouraged. But here is something important to know: You are stronger than you realize.

Inside you is resilience and grit. Learning how to develop and tap into that inner strength can help you face obstacles with courage, confidence and clarity. Whether you are navigating body image struggles, managing your health, trying new things or figuring out who you are, this article is here to help you bounce back and grow stronger.





Why **GRIT AND RESILIENCE** Matter for Teens

Being a teen often means facing academic pressure, social comparison, beauty standards and sometimes teasing or bullying, especially related to weight or appearance. These experiences can affect self-esteem, confidence and mental health.

Building grit and resilience can help you:

- Handle criticism or setbacks without shutting down
- Set goals that matter to you, not just others
- Build a healthier relationship with your body and mind
- Stand strong in who you are
- Create habits that support physical and mental health

Challenges do not disappear, but resilience helps you face them with more courage and less self-judgment.



What Does **RESILIENCE** Really Mean?

Resilience is not about being perfect, never failing or pretending everything is fine. The truth is that no one is perfect and everyone struggles at times. Resilience is about bouncing back. It is your ability to recover, learn and move forward even when things feel hard.

You are not born with resilience. It is a skill you can learn and strengthen over time.

Resilience shows up when you:

- Try again after a setback
- Ask for help when you feel vulnerable
- Challenge negative thoughts
- Keep moving toward your goals even if the path changes

Resilience is about growing through challenges, not avoiding them.

The Power of **GRIT**

Angela Duckworth, a psychologist and author of *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance*, defines grit as a mix of passion and perseverance toward long-term goals. If resilience helps you bounce back, grit is what keeps you going. It is your motivation, commitment and willingness to keep trying even when things feel difficult, boring or uncomfortable.

Grit matters because:

- Goals take time and rarely happen overnight
- Progress is not always linear
- Health journeys include ups and downs
- Confidence grows from consistency, not perfection

Having grit does not mean pushing yourself endlessly. It means caring deeply about something and staying connected to it over time. It means being on your own team.

Redefining **STRENGTH**

Many teens think strength means hiding feelings or pushing through pain. Real strength looks different.

True strength includes:

- Knowing when to rest
- Speaking up for yourself
- Setting boundaries
- Asking for support
- Caring for your mental and emotional well-being
- Choosing self-compassion over self-criticism

Strength is not perfection. It is authenticity.

Kid's Corner continued on page 26



SETBACKS Do Not Define You

Everyone experiences setbacks. A failed test, a friendship ending, body changes or comments that hurt can make it feel like all progress is lost. But setbacks are not signs of weakness. They are part of being human.

Remember:

- A setback is not a stop sign
- You can learn, adjust and keep moving forward
- Your worth is not defined by one moment or comment
- Change is possible, even when it feels slow

When setbacks happen, ask yourself:

- What can this teach me?
- What is one small goal I can accomplish today?
- What support do I need right now?

This mindset turns obstacles into opportunities for growth.

SEVEN WAYS to Build Resilience Starting Today

1. PRACTICE SELF-COMPASSION

Talk to yourself the way you would talk to a friend:

- "It's OK to not be OK."
- "I'm learning."
- "This does not define me."

Self-compassion is not weakness. It is courage.

2. BREAK GOALS INTO SMALL STEPS

Big goals can feel overwhelming. Ask yourself:

- What can I do today?
- What is one step I can take this week?
- What will help me stay consistent?

Small steps add up.

3. BUILD A SUPPORT TEAM

Surround yourself with people who encourage you, such as friends, family, teachers, mentors or trusted adults. Asking for help is a sign of strength.

4. CHALLENGE NEGATIVE THOUGHTS

Notice thoughts like:

- "I'm not good enough."
- "I'll never change."
- "Everyone is judging me."

Then ask:

- Is this thought true?
- What evidence do I have?
- What is a more realistic thought?

Changing your thoughts can change how you feel.

5. TRY NEW THINGS

Trying new activities builds confidence, even if you are not great at them. Explore a club, hobby or creative outlet. You may discover strengths you did not know you had.

6. CELEBRATE YOUR WINS

Celebrate progress, including:

- Showing up
- Trying again
- Resting when needed
- Making progress others may not see

Your growth matters.

7. TAKE CARE OF YOUR BODY

Your mind and body work together. Build resilience by:

- Getting enough sleep
- Moving in ways you enjoy
- Eating to support your energy
- Taking breaks when overwhelmed
- Listening to your body

Self-care is essential.



WHEN YOU FEEL Like Giving Up

On hard days, remember:

- You have survived 100% of your hardest days
- You are allowed to rest
- You do not need all the answers today
- Progress is not always visible
- Growth is happening, even when you cannot see it

Sometimes bouncing back starts with saying, “I’m trying.” That is enough for today.

You **DO NOT** Have to Do This Alone

Asking for help can feel scary, especially if you have been taught it is a weakness. It is not. Reaching out is one of the strongest things you can do.

If you are dealing with weight stigma, bullying, sadness, anxiety or a major life change, you deserve support. Talking with a trusted adult, therapist or mentor can help you feel understood and less alone.

YOUR FEELINGS ARE VALID.

YOUR VOICE MATTERS.

YOUR STORY IS STILL BEING WRITTEN.

Final **THOUGHTS**

Resilience and grit are not about perfection. They are about trying, learning, resting and beginning again. You build inner strength by showing up for yourself, day after day.

Remember this:

- You are capable
- You are strong
- You are worthy
- You can rise from anything

Life will challenge you, but you have the power to grow, adapt and bounce back. Each time you do, you become a little braver, a little wiser and more yourself.

Keep going. Your resilience is your superpower, and it is only getting stronger.

About the Author:

Rylan Rosario, MA, CBHC, is a psychology associate and certified behavioral health coach, who is deeply committed to serving individuals who are chronically battling health challenges. As someone that was diagnosed with Epilepsy as a teen it was through her experience she understood the value of integrated mental health treatment and now dedicates her work to working in mental health. Currently Rylan is working in Health Psychology in private practice.

10

Simple, Low-cost Ways Families Can Build Healthy Habits Together

by Michelle “Shelly” Vicari, OAC Director of Programs

Building healthy habits as a family does not require expensive programs, special foods or rigid schedules. For many families, time, money, energy and access are already limited. Between work, school, caregiving and everything else that fills a day, it can be hard to know where to start.

Health can start to feel overwhelming when it is framed as something families have to get right. In real life, healthy habits grow from small choices that fit into everyday routines. They develop through connection, consistency and kindness, not pressure or perfection.



The ideas below focus on habits families can build together over time. They are simple, flexible and designed to work in real homes with real schedules. Each one can be adjusted to fit your family's needs, space and energy.



1. Make walking part of your routine

Walking is one of the easiest habits families can build. It does not require special equipment or a certain pace. A short walk around the block, around a large store or up and down an apartment hallway still counts. Some families walk after dinner. Others fit it in before school, during a break or on weekends. Even five or 10 minutes can help everyone move a bit, clear their heads and spend time together.

Walking meetings and walking conversations are often thought to help people think more clearly and feel less stressed, something families can benefit from, too.

If getting outside is not possible because of weather, safety or mobility needs, walking indoors works as well. What matters most is moving together in a way that feels doable for your family.



2. Get in the habit of checking in with each other

Healthy habits are not only about the body. Emotional well-being plays a big role in how families get through the day and handle stress. A short, daily check-in can help everyone feel more connected. This does not have to be a long talk. It can be as simple as asking one question at dinner, during a car ride or before bed. Questions like “What was one good thing today?” or “What felt hard?” can open the door.

Over time, this small habit helps kids feel heard and reminds adults that staying connected really does matter.



3. Cook one simple meal together each week

Cooking together does not need to be complicated or take a lot of time. Simple meals made with affordable, familiar foods work just fine, and kids of all ages can help in small ways. Younger children might wash produce or stir ingredients. Older kids can help plan meals, read labels, or follow simple steps. This can also be a chance to gently try something new, like adding a different vegetable to a favorite dish or picking a simple recipe together. Keeping it low-pressure helps kids feel more open and curious about food.

Healthy Habits continued on page 30

4. Make drinking water part of the day

Keeping water easy to see and reach makes it easier for everyone to remember to drink it. That might look like a pitcher in the fridge, reusable bottles on the counter or quick reminders to take a water break during busy parts of the day. Some families also like having a favorite water mug or bottle for each person, which can make drinking water feel a little more fun.

There is no need to track ounces or set rules. Making water part of the daily routine is often enough, whether that means having a glass with meals, taking a few sips after playing outside or keeping water nearby during homework.

Easy ways to add flavor to water

- Lemon or lime slices
- Orange slices
- Cucumber slices
- Fresh or frozen berries
- Mint leaves



5. Use local free spaces for movement and play

Parks, playgrounds, schoolyards and walking paths give families easy, free places to move and play together. Kids get space to explore and adults get a chance to move, too. Movement does not have to be organized or structured to count. Running, climbing, tossing a ball or just walking around all support health.

Many communities also offer low- or no-cost options through local YMCA programs or town and city recreation departments. These might include open gym time, family swim hours or seasonal activities that welcome people of all ages and ability levels. To find a YMCA near you, visit <https://www.ymca.org/find-your-y>.

6. Pay attention to how you talk about bodies

The way families talk about bodies can shape how kids see themselves for years. Small changes in language can make a big difference. This might mean focusing on what bodies can do instead of how they look. It can also mean avoiding negative comments about weight, shape or eating in front of children. Before making a comment, asking yourself whether you would say it to a close friend is often a helpful guide.



7. Build in short movement breaks

Healthy habits do not need to take a lot of time. Short movement breaks during the day can help with focus, energy and mood, especially on busy or stressful days. Movement does not have to be planned or organized to count. A quick dance to a favorite song, stretching between tasks or playing a short game can be enough to help everyone reset. These small bursts of movement are especially helpful for kids who have a hard time sitting still for long periods.



Try this together:

Make “commercial break dancing” a family habit. When a TV show goes to commercial, move until the show comes back on. There are no rules. Jump, sway, stretch or just be silly. Even one or two minutes can make a difference. You can also build movement breaks into everyday moments, like doing a few stretches before homework, walking around the house while on phone calls or turning chores into a quick movement challenge.



8. Keep sleep routines simple and steady

Sleep plays a big role in how everyone feels during the day, from mood and focus to patience and energy. When sleep is off, even small things can feel harder. That is true for kids and adults alike. Having a simple routine at night can help signal that it is time to slow down. These might be a few familiar steps that happen in the same order most nights, like dimming the lights, turning off screens, reading together or listening to calm music.

Routines do not need to be perfect to work. Some nights will run late or feel chaotic, and that is OK. What helps most is doing roughly the same things when you can, so bedtime feels predictable and calmer over time.



9. Treat rest as something everyone needs

Many families feel pressure to stay busy all the time. Schedules fill up quickly and rest often gets pushed aside or treated like something you earn after everything else is done. Building rest into the day sends a different message. It tells kids and adults that slowing down is part of taking care of themselves, not a sign of laziness.

Rest might look like a few quiet minutes after school, sitting together without talking, taking a few deep breaths before bedtime or lying on the couch and listening to music. For some families, it might mean stepping outside for fresh air or turning off screens a little earlier in the evening.

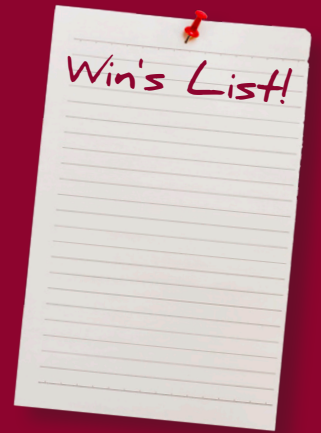
When rest becomes a regular part of the day, it helps everyone reset and recharge. It can improve mood, reduce stress and make it easier to handle the next part of the day.

10. Notice effort and habits, not numbers

Healthy habits are built by showing up again and again, not by chasing results. When families notice effort, it helps everyone feel encouraged without putting the focus on weight or appearance. That might mean noticing when someone tries a new food, moves a little more comfortably, handles stress better or gets better sleep. Those moments count.

Try this together:

Create a weekly “wins list.” Keep a piece of paper on the fridge or a note on your phone where anyone in the family can write down small wins from the week. At the end of the week, read them together and celebrate with something simple, like choosing a family movie, playing a favorite game or picking the next walk route.



When the focus stays on habits instead of numbers, health feels more supportive and a lot less stressful.

One habit at a time

Families do not need to change everything at once. Choosing one small habit to focus on is often the most realistic place to begin. Not every day will go smoothly and that is OK. What matters is showing yourself and your family grace and patience, even on the hard days. Healthy habits are built by doing small things again and again.

About the Author:

Michelle “Shelly” Vicari is the Director of Programs for the Obesity Action Coalition (OAC). She studied Child Development & Family Studies and Political Science at San Diego State University and previously served as Curriculum Director for the largest NAEYC-accredited child care centers in Southern California. At OAC, she leads a variety of education and support initiatives, including Thrive Together, a youth and families program that provides resources, community and events for children, teens and parents affected by obesity.

MOVEMENT THAT MEETS YOU WHERE YOU ARE

by Summer Kessel, RD, CSOWM, LDN

If the idea of “working out” feels intimidating, you are not alone. Many people in larger bodies have been taught that exercise is a punishment or something only meant for people who already feel fit. That message can make movement feel stressful instead of helpful. It is also untrue. I grew up both as an athlete and in a larger body, and I see movement differently. My hope is that this article helps you think about exercise in a way that feels supportive, realistic, and possible for you.

Movement is not a test. It is not about willpower or doing things perfectly. You do not owe movement to anyone. Some days you may move more. Some days you may not move at all. That does not mean you failed. Movement is one part of overall health. Health also includes access to health care, nourishing food, mental well-being, rest, and support. Exercise can support health without being extreme or all or nothing. There is no single right way to move your body. Movement counts in many forms.

Fitness can meet you where you are today, not where you think you should be. Walking around the block, stretching in your living room, dancing in the kitchen, doing chair-based movement, or lifting weights at the gym all count. The goal is not perfection. The goal is to build confidence, consistency, and a relationship with movement that fits your life.

“THE GOAL IS NOT PERFECTION.”

EXERCISE IS A TOOL, NOT A TEST

Health and weight management are complex. Many things affect them, including genetics, medications, stress, sleep, mental health, and access to care. Exercise plays a small role in weight change by itself. Movement is just one tool that can support health. It is not a cure and it is not a measure of your worth.

Many people think they need to lose weight before they can start exercising. Often, it works the other way around. Movement can help people feel better in their bodies before any weight changes happen. It can also be helpful even if weight never changes. For some, focusing on treatment or weight management first makes movement feel easier later. Both paths are OK.

You do not need to exercise to deserve good health care. Movement can be added when it feels right for you. For people using obesity medications or other treatments, movement can help support muscles, joints, and mental health. If you are not ready to exercise, that does not mean you cannot focus on other parts of your care.

People living with obesity deserve:

- Respectful, stigma-free medical care
- Nutrition support that feels realistic and enjoyable
- Mental health support that addresses shame and stress
- Movement that supports health, not punishment



WHY MOVE AT ALL?

Movement can support your health in many ways. It can help manage blood sugar, support joint health and mobility, improve mood, stress, and sleep, help maintain muscle during weight changes, and build confidence and trust in your body over time.

These benefits do not require intense workouts or expensive programs. They come from consistency. Consistency grows when movement feels doable. Before consistency can happen, you simply have to start.

STARTING WHERE YOU ARE MATTERS

When exercise feels like a test you might fail, many people avoid it. When movement is seen as something that can help you feel stronger, steadier, or more capable in daily life, it can feel worth trying.

STARTING WHERE YOU ARE MIGHT LOOK LIKE:

- Walking for five minutes
- Stretching or standing during TV time
- Doing chair-based movement when standing feels unsafe
- Dancing to one song
- Going to physical therapy
- Using free apps or online videos at home



These are not “less than” choices. They are smart and realistic. Confidence grows when your body learns, I can do this. As confidence grows, ability often grows too.

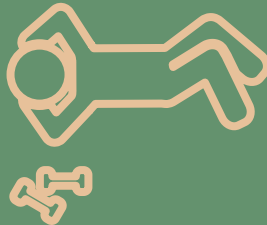
Movement does not need to look a certain way. Bodies are different. Schedules are different. Energy levels are different. Movement that works for you is any movement you are more likely to keep doing. If cost has been a barrier, know this. Your body does not know the difference between an expensive program and consistent movement at home.

PROGRESS IS BUILT ON SMALL WINS

Social media often shows exercise as something that leads to big, dramatic changes. Real-life progress usually looks quieter than that.

PROGRESS MIGHT LOOK LIKE:

- Feeling less nervous about movement
- Feeling less sore doing the same activity
- Feeling steadier on your feet
- Needing fewer breaks
- Feeling proud that you showed up



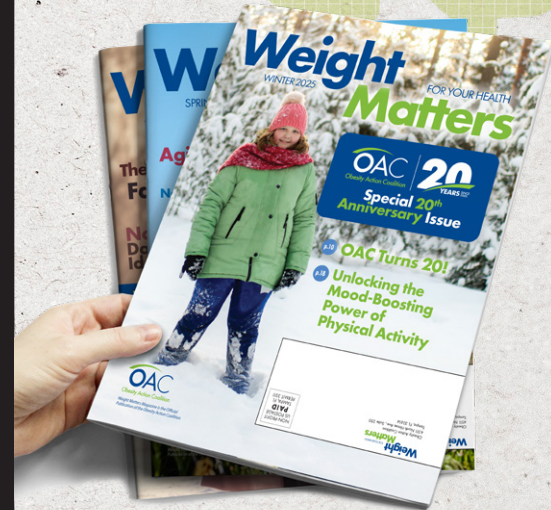
When starting a new routine, ask yourself: What is the smallest version of this habit I can do on my hardest day? If the answer is five minutes, that is enough. Five minutes done often is more helpful than an hour done once.

You also do not need to love exercise right away. At first, it is okay to choose movement you can tolerate and repeat. Enjoyment may grow over time, but it is not required at the start.

Movement continued on page 34

PASS IT ON-

BE PART OF OUR GREEN INITIATIVE!



Finished enjoying this issue? Don't let the journey end here! Pass this copy of *Weight Matters Magazine* along to friends, family or colleagues to give this OAC resource new life. By passing this magazine on, you help reduce waste and promote sustainability. Let's keep the pages turning and make a positive impact on the environment. Thank you for being part of our green initiative!



NAVIGATING THE GYM WITH LESS STRESS

For some people, the gym feels motivating. For others, it feels uncomfortable or overwhelming. A gym can offer equipment and structure, but it is not required for movement to count.

If you are curious about going to a gym, these tips may help.

Before you join

- Think about what matters to you, like cost, location, or feeling comfortable
- Visit gyms at the time of day you would normally go
- Ask for a tour or short trial before signing up

When you start

- Begin with familiar equipment
- Ask about beginner sessions
- Use machines before free weights for more guidance
- Wear clothing that feels comfortable and supportive
- Set boundaries around sales pressure
- Start with realistic goals, such as short visits a few days a week
- Bring water and wear closed-toe shoes

Most people at the gym are focused on themselves.

You are allowed to take up space exactly as you are. A gym that feels welcoming and realistic is more helpful than one that looks impressive.

About the Author:

Summer Kessel, RD, CSOWM, LDN is a registered dietitian and certified specialist in obesity and weight management. She is co-founder and chief of operations, community and nutrition at Vineyard, a virtual weight management and cardiometabolic health clinic, and the author of *Living Your Healthiest Semaglutide Life: A Complete Guide to Nutrition and Mindset While on GLP-1 Medications and Simple Meal Solutions for GLP-1 Diets: 75 Recipes for Sustainable Weight Loss and Good Health*. Her work focuses on personalized, sustainable, evidence-based nutrition that supports quality of life. She is also a person living with obesity and currently in maintenance on a GLP-1 medication. Summer shares her personal journey on social media at @summerthedietitian.

SHOW UP WITHOUT BURNING OUT

If you already move regularly, or if exercise has come and gone in your life, these ideas still apply. Doing more does not always mean doing better. It helps to pause and check in with how movement fits into your life.

Ask yourself:

- Do I enjoy this or dread it?
- Does it improve my quality of life?
- Does it crowd out other things I care about?
- Does it help me feel stronger or more worn down?
- Would I still do this if my weight did not change?

Burnout often happens when people do too much, too fast, for too long. Preventing burnout means allowing rest, flexibility, and change so movement supports your life instead of competing with it.

WAYS TO REDUCE EXERCISE BURNOUT:

- Rotate types of movement
- Try new activities or settings
- Plan rest days on purpose
- Adjust intensity based on stress and sleep
- Focus on consistency rather than performance
- Modify workouts instead of skipping them
- Take breaks when needed
- Let go of all-or-nothing thinking



PROGRESS, NOT PERFECTION

Progress comes from protecting your ability to keep moving over time. Rest, sleep, recovery, and regular nourishment all matter. Listening to your body and adjusting when needed helps prevent injury and keeps movement sustainable.

Movement is not reserved for certain bodies. You do not need to change your body to deserve movement, and you do not need to use movement as punishment. You are allowed to start small, go slowly, change plans, and redefine what fitness means to you.

Wherever you are starting from, starting is enough. Choosing to move is one way to practice showing up for yourself, and that is a skill worth building.



**Her soccer dreams
didn't change.
Her brain did.**

Not all obesity is the same. Issues with weight, hunger, and fatigue after a brain tumor or brain injury could be a sign of a distinct form of obesity called acquired hypothalamic obesity, or acquired HO.

Learn more about Rhythm's educational resources at HO.DifferentObesity.com or scan the QR code on the right.



Actor portrayal

Rhythm
PHARMACEUTICALS

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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