

# Obesity

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## Ask Your Patients ...

"Do you know that losing just 10% of your body weight can have substantial benefits?"

## If Your Patient Asks ...

"How can I control my weight?"

## DEFINE the problem

Overweight and Obesity in the United States has now reached **epidemic proportions**. Nearly **65% of adults** are overweight or obese, and **16% of children** are overweight.<sup>1</sup>

Research has established a **strong association** between obesity and several **serious medical conditions**, including:

- Cardiovascular disease
- Type 2 diabetes
- Hypertension
- Cancer (breast, colorectal, endometrial and kidney cancers)
- Stroke

Obesity is associated with **increased risks** for sleep apnea, infertility, surgical complications and wound infections. Obesity has become the second leading underlying **cause of death**, not far behind tobacco use.<sup>2</sup>

## WHEN weight is an issue

Body mass index (BMI) has replaced the traditional weight-height ratio as the method of determining whether an individual is overweight or obese. Overweight is defined as a BMI of 25.0–29.9 kg/m<sup>2</sup>; obesity, as a BMI of 30.0–39.9 kg/m<sup>2</sup>; and extreme (or severe) obesity, as a BMI of 40.0 kg/m<sup>2</sup> or more.<sup>3</sup>

The circumference of the waist can also be used to determine overweight or obesity.<sup>4</sup> Weight loss should be encouraged when the waist is more than 35 inches (women) or 40 inches (men), even if the BMI is less than 25 kg/m<sup>2</sup>.

BMI is calculated by dividing the weight (in pounds) by height (in inches) twice and then multiplying the result by 703; the result is presented as kilograms per square meter. For example, a person who weighs 200 pounds and is 6 feet (72 inches) tall has a BMI of 27.1 kg/m<sup>2</sup>.

BMI calculators are available online (such as [www.nhlbisupport.com/bmi/](http://www.nhlbisupport.com/bmi/)) and BMI charts can be downloaded from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website ([www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)).

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### WHO is at highest risk

The prevalence of overweight and obesity varies according to several factors, including gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.

#### Gender

In general, the incidence of overweight is higher for men than women, but the rates of obesity and severe obesity are higher for women across all ethnicities.

#### Ethnicity

For both men and women, the prevalence of overweight and obesity is considerably higher for Mexican American and African American adults than for white adults. The incidence is also high for American Indians but is low for Asian Americans.<sup>5</sup>

#### Socioeconomic Status

Socioeconomic status also influences overweight and obesity. Minority women with a low socio-economic status have the greatest likelihood of being overweight or obese.

### HOW to help your patients

Encourage your overweight or obese patients to lose weight, emphasizing the following points:

- Losing just 10% of their weight can minimize health risks.
- Goals should be easy and realistic. Weight loss should be gradual (1–2 pounds per week), which can be achieved by reducing food intake by about 500–1,000 calories per day.
- Selecting healthy foods is just as important as eating smaller portions.
- Physical activity enhances weight loss and adds health benefits. Exercise can be simple (such as walking) and can be increased gradually to about 60 minutes daily.
- Behavior modification is important. Support groups or counseling can help elicit reasons for overeating.

### WHERE to find resources

- **National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute and North American Association for the Study of Obesity.** *The Practical Guide. Identification, Evaluation, and Treatment of Overweight and Obesity in Adults.* ([www.nhlbi.nih.gov/guidelines/obesity/prctgd\\_c.pdf](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/guidelines/obesity/prctgd_c.pdf)). Comprehensive information for healthcare professionals.
- **National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases** ([www.niddk.nih.gov](http://www.niddk.nih.gov)). Section devoted to weight loss and control.
- **American Obesity Association** ([www.obesity.org](http://www.obesity.org)). Resources for healthcare professionals as well as the general public.
- **North American Association for the Study of Obesity (NAASO), The Obesity Society** ([www.naaso.org](http://www.naaso.org)). Resource for healthcare professionals and the general public.

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- **National Weight Control Registry ([www.nwcr.ws](http://www.nwcr.ws)).**  
Database of individuals who have lost a large amount of weight and maintained the weight loss over a substantial amount of time. Success stories are featured.
- **MyPyramid.gov ([www.mypyramid.gov](http://www.mypyramid.gov)).**  
Website sponsored by the U.S. Department of Agriculture that offers help in planning healthy eating habits according to the food pyramid.

- 1 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Overweight and obesity: frequently asked questions (FAQs). Available at: [www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/obesity/faq.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/obesity/faq.htm). Accessed August 29, 2006.
- 2 American Obesity Association. AOA fact sheet: What is obesity? Available at: [www.obesity.org/subs/fastfacts/obesity\\_what2.shtml](http://www.obesity.org/subs/fastfacts/obesity_what2.shtml). Accessed August 29, 2006.
- 3 World Health Organization. Preventing and Managing the Global Epidemic of Obesity. Report of the World Health Organization Consultation of Obesity. Geneva, Switzerland: WHO, June 1997.
- 4 National Institutes of Health, National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. *Clinical Guidelines on the Identification, Evaluation, and Treatment of Overweight and Obesity in Adults. The Evidence Report*. Available at: [www.nhlbi.nih.gov/guidelines/obesity/ob\\_gdlns.pdf](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/guidelines/obesity/ob_gdlns.pdf). Accessed August 29, 2006.
- 5 American Obesity Association. AOA fact sheet: Obesity in minority populations. Available at: [www.obesity.org/subs/fastfacts/Obesity\\_Minority\\_Pop.shtml](http://www.obesity.org/subs/fastfacts/Obesity_Minority_Pop.shtml). Accessed August 29, 2006.
- 6 Department of Health and Human Services and Department of Agriculture. *Dietary Guidelines, 2005*. Toolkit for professionals. Available at: [www.health.gov/dietaryguidelines/dga2005/toolkit/](http://www.health.gov/dietaryguidelines/dga2005/toolkit/). Accessed August 29, 2006.

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