

# Obesity

*“In the past 30 years, the prevalence of overweight and obesity has increased sharply for both adults and children. Between 1976–1980 and 2003–2004, the prevalence of obesity among adults aged 20–74 years increased from 15.0% to 32.9%.”*

*~ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*

## Defining Obesity

Overweight and obesity are both labels for ranges of weight that are greater than what is generally considered healthy for a given height. The terms also identify ranges of weight that have been shown to increase the likelihood of certain diseases and other health problems such as:

- Hypertension
- Dyslipidemia (for example, high total cholesterol or high levels of triglycerides)
- Type 2 diabetes
- Coronary heart disease
- Stroke
- Gallbladder disease

- Osteoarthritis
- Sleep apnea and respiratory problems
- Some cancers (endometrial, breast, and colon)

## Definitions for Adults

For adults, overweight and obesity ranges are determined by using weight and height to calculate a number called the “body mass index” (BMI). BMI is used because, for most people, it correlates with their amount of body fat.

- An adult who has a BMI between 25 and 29.9 is considered overweight
- An adult who has a BMI of 30 or higher is considered obese

It is important to remember that although BMI correlates with the amount of body fat, BMI does not directly measure body fat. As a result, some people, such as athletes with well-developed muscles, may have a BMI that identifies them as overweight even though they do not have excess body fat.



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Other methods of estimating body fat and body fat distribution include measurements of skinfold thickness and waist circumference, calculation of waist-to-hip circumference ratios, and techniques such as ultrasound, computed tomography, and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI).

## Definitions for Children and Teens

For children and teens, BMI ranges above a normal weight have different labels (at risk of overweight and overweight). Additionally, BMI ranges for children and teens are defined so that they take into account normal differences in body fat between boys and girls and differences in body fat at various ages.

## Risk Factors

Researchers have found that several factors can contribute to the likelihood of someone's becoming overweight or obese. The following are risk factors for adults and children:

- **Behaviors:** What people eat and their level of physical activity help determine whether they will gain weight. A number of factors can influence diet and physical activity, including personal characteristics of the individual, the individual's environment, cultural attitudes, and financial situation.
- **Genetics:** Heredity plays a large role in determining how susceptible people are to becoming overweight or obese. Genes can influence how the body burns calories for energy and how the body stores fat.



Environmental factors also play a big role in childhood obesity. Home, child care, school, and community environments can influence children's behaviors related to food intake and physical activity. Some environmental risk factors are:

- **Within the home:** Parent-child interactions and the home environment can affect the behaviors of children and youth related to calorie intake and physical activity. Parents are role models for their children who are likely to develop habits similar to their own.
- **Within child care:** Almost 80% of children aged five years and younger with working mothers are in child care for 40 hours a week on average. Child care providers are sharing responsibility with parents for children during important developmental years. Child care can be a setting in which healthy eating and physical activity habits are developed.
- **Within schools:** Because the majority of young people aged 5–17 years are enrolled in schools and because of the amount of time that children spend at school each day, schools provide an ideal setting for teaching children and teens to adopt healthy eating and physical activity behaviors. According to the Institute of Medicine, schools and school districts are increasingly implementing innovative programs that focus on improving the nutrition and increasing physical activity of students.
- **Within the community:** The built environment within communities influences access to physical activity opportunities and affordable, healthy foods. For example, a lack of sidewalks, safe bike paths, and parks in neighborhoods can discourage children from walking or biking to school as well as from participating in physical activity. Additionally, lack of access to affordable, healthy food choices in neighborhood food markets can be a barrier to purchasing healthy foods.

## What are some suggestions for losing weight?

Most experts recommend that someone attempting to lose a large amount of weight consult with a personal physician or health care professional before beginning a weight-loss program. However, general recommendations are:

- **Aim for a healthy weight.** People who need to lose weight should do so gradually, at a rate of one-half to two pounds per week.
- **Be active.** The safest and most effective way to lose weight is to reduce calories and increase physical activity. Always check with your doctor before starting any exercise program.
- **Eat well.** Select sensible portion sizes and follow the Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

Weight-loss surgeries, over-the-counter and prescription drugs and other methods for losing weight should be discussed with your physician first.

**For more information on Obesity, and to calculate your BMI log onto [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).**

**For more information about Nationwide Better Health visit: [www.nwbetterhealth.com](http://www.nwbetterhealth.com) Or contact your benefits representative.**



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