**Obesity**

Obesity is defined as having a Body Mass Index (BMI) of 30 or higher.\(^1\) *(For information on how BMI is calculated, see the sidebar.)* It’s a greater health problem than just carrying a few extra pounds and is linked to a number of serious health conditions, including heart disease, diabetes, cancer, stroke and osteoarthritis.\(^1\)

About a third of adults in the U.S. are obese.\(^1\) While it’s true that eating more calories than you use is what causes weight gain, sometimes people who exercise regularly and eat reasonable amounts still become very heavy.\(^2\)

Genetics is a factor in determining whether someone will struggle to maintain a healthy weight, as is gender. Men tend to have more muscle than women, and because muscle burns more calories even at rest than other types of tissue, men are less likely to gain weight. Plus, women tend to retain four to six extra pounds after each pregnancy. Loss of muscle mass and slowing of the metabolism is part of the aging process and contributes to weight gain in both women and men.\(^2\)

Other factors that contribute to an individual’s likelihood of becoming obese include environmental factors – habits picked up from the people around you – and emotions. Many people overeat out of boredom or depression.\(^2\) Combined with a sedentary lifestyle, this can add up to excess weight that is difficult to shed.

**Complications**

The psychological effects of obesity can be devastating, leading to feelings of isolation, low self-esteem, depression and anxiety.\(^3\) Other complications include:\(^1,3\)

- Type 2 diabetes
- Cardiovascular disease
- Stroke
- Hypertension (high blood pressure)
- Congestive heart failure
- Cancer of the kidney, endometrium, breast, colon and rectum, esophagus, prostate and gall bladder
- Stress urinary incontinence
- Dyslipidemia (for example, high total cholesterol or high levels of triglycerides)
- Liver and gallbladder disease
- Sleep apnea and respiratory problems
- Osteoarthritis (a degeneration of cartilage and the underlying bone within a joint)
- Gynecological problems (abnormal menses, infertility)
- Death

Your doctor can use your BMI in conjunction with other measures to determine whether you are overweight or obese, and how high your risk is for complications.\(^1\) The National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI) suggests two other measures:\(^4,5\)

- Waist circumference – abdominal fat is a predictor of risk for obesity-related diseases
- Other risk factors for obesity-related conditions, such as inactivity or high blood pressure

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\(^1\) [For information on how BMI is calculated, see the sidebar.]

\(^2\) Genetic factors are believed to influence both the amount of fat stored and the ability to lose weight.

\(^3\) Obesity is associated with increased levels of stress hormones, which can lead to feelings of depression and anxiety.

\(^4\) Waist circumference is a simple and convenient way to assess central obesity.

\(^5\) Other risk factors can include high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and family history of obesity-related diseases.
Where do I begin?

While doctors recommend a goal of losing 10 percent of your total body weight if you are obese, even smaller amounts of weight loss can be beneficial.⁶

- Losing two pounds drops low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol levels by 1 percent.
- Losing 10 to 15 pounds can slow the development and halt the symptoms of knee osteoarthritis.
- Losing 5 to 10 percent of your body weight can raise high-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol levels.
- Losing 5 to 15 percent of your body weight can lower your chances of developing heart disease or having a stroke.

How do you get started?

Check out the programs and discounts available through SpecialOffers@Anthem at anthem.com. You can save money on joining Jenny Craig®, Weight Watchers®, or the SelfHelpWorks online support program, and get discounts on fitness club memberships and health and wellness products through ChooseHealthy™ or GlobalFit™. To see a full list of programs, visit anthem.com.

When beginning a weight loss or exercise program, it is important to have a conversation with your doctor about what is healthy and reasonable for you. Following are some tips from the NHLBI’s “Guide to Behavior Change”:

- Set SAFE goals: Specific, Attainable, Forgiving, Effective. For example, “Exercise 30 minutes a day, 5 days a week,” is a SAFE goal. “Exercise more,” is not. Set yourself up to succeed – the more successful you are, the more successful you will continue to be!
- Monitor yourself. Choose some aspect of your health regimen to monitor, whether it is your weight, calorie intake or exercise. Seeing yourself make progress – exercising longer, eating fewer calories, dropping a couple pounds – can be very encouraging.

Body Mass Index (BMI)

Your BMI is calculated using the following formula:

\[ \text{BMI} = \frac{\text{weight}}{\text{height}^2} \times 703 \]

Divide your weight in pounds by your height in inches squared, and multiply by 703.

**Example:**

\[ \text{Weight} = 150 \text{ lbs}, \ \text{Height} = 5’5” (65”) \]

**Calculation:**

\[ \frac{150}{(65)^2} \times 703 = \text{BMI} \]

Be aware of your cues. Pay attention to what makes you overeat or crave unhealthy foods, and make a plan for handling such situations. Also, slow the pace of your eating – it takes 15 minutes or more for your brain to get the message that you’ve eaten. Eating more slowly or starting your meal with a salad or fresh veggies can help you feel full sooner.

Resources

Obesity in America offers a list of support groups, as well as profiles of people battling weight problems, and common myths about obesity. Online support groups can be found at obesitydiscussion.com. Or, visit the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute’s website, nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/obesity, for a BMI calculator, a menu planner, recipes, tip sheets and information about choosing the weight loss program that is right for you.

Visit anthem.com for more ways to get healthy – and stay healthy.

**Sources**

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/obesity/
2. eMedicineHealth. emedicinehealth.com
3. ObesityinAmerica. obesityinamerica.org/support.html
4. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/defining.htm
6. ObesityinAmerica. obesityinamerica.org/benefits.html
7. MedicineNet.com. 10 Ways to Help a Loved One Lose Weight: medicineNet.com
10. RightCHOICE® Managed Care, Inc. (RIT), Healthy Alliance® Life Insurance Company (HALIC), and HMO Missouri, Inc. RIT and certain affiliates administer non-HMO benefits underwritten by HALIC and HMO Missouri, Inc. RIT and certain affiliates only provide administrative services for self-funded plans and do not underwrite benefits. In New Hampshire: Anthem Health Plans of New Hampshire, Inc. In Ohio: Community Insurance Company. In Virginia: Anthem Health Plans of Virginia, Inc. trades as Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield in Virginia, and its service area is all of Virginia except for the City of Fairfax, the Town of Vienna, and the area east of State Route 123. In Wisconsin: Blue Cross Blue Shield of Wisconsin (“BCBSWi”), which underwrites or administers the PPO policies; and Compcare Health Services Insurance Corporation (“Compcare”), which underwrites or administers the HMO policies; and Compcare of New Hampshire, Inc. In Ohio: Community Insurance Company. In Virginia: Anthem Health Plans of Virginia, Inc. trades as Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield in Virginia, and its service area is all of Virginia except for the City of Fairfax, the Town of Vienna, and the area east of State Route 123. In Wisconsin: Blue Cross Blue Shield of Wisconsin (“BCBSWi”), which underwrites or administers the POS policies. Independent licensees of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association. © ANTHEM is a registered trademark of Anthem Insurance Companies, Inc. The Blue Cross and Blue Shield names and symbols are registered marks of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association.