Health Basics A-Z

Obesity

WHAT IS OBESITY?

Closely related to being overweight, obesity is a range of weight that categorizes a person as being unhealthy. This is based on body mass index (BMI), a number calculated from someone's weight and height that is linked to the amount of body fat he or she carries.

As defined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), an overweight adult is one who has a BMI between 25 and 29.9. An obese adult is one who has a BMI of 30 or higher.

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.

For children and teens, the CDC uses BMI-for-age measurements that account for normal differences in body fat between boys and girls and differences in body fat for the sexes at various ages.

WHAT CAUSES OBESITY?

Obesity is caused by a variety of factors, both simple and complex. At the simple end of the spectrum, weight gain and obesity can result when people consume more calories than they burn. But complex issues such as genetics, metabolism, behavior, the environment, culture and socioeconomic status also come into play.

OBESITY AND LATINOS

Statistics show that obesity disproportionately affects Latinos. The illness puts them at risk for a number of obesity-related diseases, such as diabetes, hypertension, cancer and heart disease.

- Latinos have a 21 percent higher obesity prevalence than non-Hispanic whites.
- In 2009, Latinos were 1.2 times as likely to be obese than non-Hispanic whites.
- 31 percent of Latinos over the of 18 are obese, compared to 25 percent of non-Hispanic whites.
- 11.1 percent of Latino female high school students are obese, compared to 6.2 percent of white

high school students and 18.9 percent of Latino male high school students are obese, compared to 13.8 percent of white high school students.

- 38.2 percent of Latino children ages 2-19 are overweight or obese compared with 31.7 percent of all children within that age range.

- Mexican Americans tend to be overweight or obese more than other Latino groups. Among Mexican American women, 73 percent are overweight or obese, as compared to only 61.6 percent of the general female population and in 2007 - 2008 Mexican American children were 1.4 times more likely to be overweight as non- Hispanic white Children.

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN OBESITY AND MORBID OBESITY
Simply stated, the difference between obesity and morbid obesity is that obesity is a common medical condition while morbid obesity is considered a disease.

Health experts define obesity as being 20 percent or more over one's ideal body weight. Morbid obesity is a much more severe form of obesity. People who are 100 or more pounds overweight are considered morbidly obese.

Doctors recognize morbid obesity as a serious health condition that can interfere with basic physical functions such as breathing or walking.

As previously stated, obesity puts people at risk for a number of diseases. Those who are morbidly obese are at even greater risk for certain illnesses, such as diabetes, high blood pressure, sleep apnea, gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD), gallstones, osteoarthritis, heart disease and cancer.

HOW CAN OBESITY BE PREVENTED?
Government health care organizations and other disease control and prevention entities recognize that obesity is a preventable condition.

To combat the problem, they have implemented many policy and environmental initiatives that support affordable and easy lifestyle changes in the areas of nutrition and fitness.

Many state-based programs work in conjunction with multiple partners. Their goal is to help eliminate obesity by educating people and empowering them to make specific lifestyle changes to decrease the condition. These include:

- Increasing physical activity
- Consuming more fruits and vegetables
- Drinking fewer sugar-sweetened beverages
- Encouraging mothers to breast-feed their babies
- Consuming less high-calorie food
- Cutting back on television viewing

OBESITY TREATMENT OPTIONS
To treat obesity, doctors recommend patients lose weight and maintain weight loss over the long term through diet and regular physical activity.

For additional treatment, doctors may prescribe medications for overweight or obese patients.

Doctors caution, however, that prescription weight-loss medications are appropriate for patients at increased medical risk because of their weight, not for people seeking “cosmetic” weight loss. In addition, they stress that patients should try to lose weight through diet and exercise before resorting to medications.

MORBID OBESITY TREATMENT OPTIONS
For very overweight patients who can’t lose weight via healthy diet and exercise, doctors recommend surgery as an option.

This kind of surgery is called bariatric surgery, bypass surgery, gastric banding and obesity surgery. In particular, doctors recommend this option for men at least 100 pounds overweight and women at least 80 pounds overweight.

In addition, doctors may recommend surgery for patients who are less overweight if they have diabetes, heart disease or sleep apnea.

WHERE TO GO FOR HELP
The first resource for information and recommendations for treatment options is always a family doctor or other health care provider.

In addition, it’s always recommended you educate yourself about any illness or condition you experience. Some authoritative online resources are below. Visit them for fact sheets, videos and

other materials about obesity.

- The Food and Drug Administration
- The National Institutes of Health
- The American Obesity Association
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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