

**TeensHealth.org**

A safe, private place to get doctor-approved information on health, emotions, and life.

When Being Overweight Is a Health Problem

In our looks-obsessed society, lots of people think that being overweight is an appearance issue. But being overweight is actually a medical concern because it can seriously affect a person's health.

Diabetes and heart disease are health problems that can stem from being overweight. Being overweight can also affect a person's joints, breathing, sleep, mood, and energy levels. So being overweight can affect a person's entire quality of life.

Defining Overweight

When people eat more calories than they use, their bodies store the extra calories as fat.

A couple of pounds of extra body fat are not a health risk for most people. But when people keep up a pattern of eating more calories than they burn, more and more fat builds up in their bodies.

Eventually, the body gets to a point where the amount of body fat can harm a person's health. Doctors use the terms "overweight" or "obese" to tell if someone has a greater chance of developing weight-related health problems.

As you've probably heard, more people are overweight today than ever before. The "obesity epidemic" affects kids and teens as well as adults. So younger people are now getting health problems that used to affect only adults, like high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and type 2 diabetes.

Why Do People Become Overweight?

Obesity tends to run in families. Some people have a genetic tendency to gain weight more easily than others. Although genes strongly influence body type and size, the environment also plays a role.

People today are gaining weight because of unhealthy food choices (like fast food) and family habits (like eating in front of the TV instead of around a table). High-calorie, low-nutrient snacks and beverages, bigger portions of food, and less-active lifestyles are all contributing to the obesity epidemic.

Sometimes people turn to food for emotional reasons, such as when they feel upset, anxious, sad, stressed out, or even bored. When this happens, they often eat more than they need.

Measuring Weight

Figuring out if a teen is overweight is a little more complicated than it is for adults. That's because teens are still growing and developing.

Doctors and other health care professionals use a measurement called body mass index (BMI) to tell if someone is overweight.

The doctor calculates BMI using a person's height and weight, and then plots that number on a chart. There are different charts for girls or guys. BMI estimates how much body fat the person has.

Because muscle weighs more than fat, a muscular person can have a high BMI, but not too much body fat. Likewise, it's possible for someone to have a low or ideal BMI but still have too much body fat.

You may get a BMI report from school, but the best way to understand BMI is to talk to your doctor.

Health Problems of Being Overweight

Obesity is bad news for both body and mind. Not only can it make someone feel tired and uncomfortable, carrying extra weight puts added stress on the body, especially the bones and joints of the legs. Kids and teens who are overweight are more likely to develop diabetes and other health problems. And overweight adults have a higher chance of getting heart disease.

Weight-related health problems include:

Asthma. Obesity increases the chance of having asthma. Breathing problems related to weight can make it harder to keep up with friends, play sports, or just walk from class to class.

Sleep apnea. This condition (where a person temporarily stops breathing during sleep) is a serious problem for many overweight kids and adults. Sleep apnea can leave people feeling tired and affect their ability to concentrate and learn. It also may lead to heart problems.

High blood pressure. When blood pressure is high, the heart has to work harder. If the problem continues for a long time, high blood pressure can damage the heart and arteries.

High cholesterol. Abnormal blood lipid levels, including high cholesterol, low HDL ("good") cholesterol, and high triglyceride levels, increase the chances of having a heart attack or stroke when a person gets older.

Gallstones. A buildup of bile that hardens in the gallbladder forms gallstones. These can be painful and require surgery.

Fatty liver. If fat builds up in the liver, it can cause inflammation, scarring, and permanent liver damage.

Joint and muscle pain. Wear and tear on the joints from carrying extra weight may lead to arthritis in adulthood.

Slipped capital femoral epiphyses (SCFE). SCFE is a painful hip problem that requires immediate attention and surgery to prevent further damage to the joint.

Pseudotumor cerebri. This is a rare cause of severe headaches in obese teens and adults. There is no tumor, but pressure builds in the brain. Besides headaches, symptoms may include vomiting, double vision, and other vision problems.

Polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS). Although it's normal for girls to have some testosterone (the male hormone), girls with PCOS have higher testosterone levels in the blood. They also may have irregular periods, too much hair growth, and bad acne.

Insulin resistance and diabetes. Insulin is a hormone that lowers the level of glucose (a type of sugar) in the blood. When there is too much body fat, insulin is less effective at getting glucose, the body's main source of energy, into cells. The body then needs more insulin to maintain a normal blood sugar level. For some overweight teens, insulin resistance progresses to diabetes (high blood sugar).

Depression. People who are obese are more likely to be depressed and have lower self-esteem.

Luckily, it's never too late to make changes that can help control weight gain and the health problems it causes. Those changes don't have to be big. For a start, make a plan to cut back on sugary beverages, control portions, and get more exercise, even if it's just 5–10 minutes a day. Build your way up to big changes by making a series of small ones. And don't be afraid to ask for help!

Reviewed by: Mary L. Gavin, MD

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Post Test – January 2022

**Please keep this test and certificate in your files for Licensing.
You do not need to send it in to our office or the State.**

1. Being overweight is actually a medical concern because it can seriously affect a person's _____.
2. The “obesity epidemic” affects _____ and _____ as well as adults.
3. Although genes strongly influence body type and size, the environment does not play a role.
True or False?
4. Doctors and other health care professionals use a _____ called body mass index (BMI) to tell is someone is overweight.
5. Kids and teen are more likely to develop _____ and other health problems.
6. Obesity increases the chance of having _____ making it harder to keep up with friends, play sports or just walk from class to class.
7. When blood pressure is high, the heart has to work harder and can cause damage to the heart and arteries.
True or False?
8. If fat builds up in the liver, it can cause _____, scarring and permanent liver damage.
9. When there is too much body fat, insulin is less effective at getting glucose, the body's main source of _____, into cells
10. People who are obese are more likely to be _____ and have lower self-esteem. Luckily, it's never too late to make changes that can help control weight gain and the health problems it causes.

December 2021 Quiz Answers. 1. Feelings 2. Change 3. True 4. Binge
5. Physical/Emotional 6. Situations 7. Activity 8. Trigger 9. Take 5
10. Nutritionists



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