



Health Risks of Being Overweight

Fact:

Being overweight carries serious mental and physical risks.

Fiction:

It's a myth that overweight people are lazier or less intelligent.

Prevention:

Being overweight can often be prevented with a healthy lifestyle.

Treatment:

Diet and exercise are the best way to lose weight, followed by other options, if necessary.

Many Americans are overweight, and this carries serious health risks.

Who Has a Weight Problem?

A third of Americans are obese, meaning they are 20% or more over their ideal body weight, and the number is rising steadily.* Approximately 4.7 million children age 6 to 17 are obese as well.*

Risks of being overweight increase with:

- Family or personal history of being overweight
- Cultural influences, especially for children with a lower socioeconomic status and an obese mother
- Excess food intake and poor food choices
- Lack of exercise
- Pregnancy—15% of all women gain 20 or more pounds with each pregnancy
- Drugs, including steroids and hormones
- Some psychiatric conditions*

Ironically, dieting and eating disorders can increase obesity.

Mental Risks of Being Overweight

Our society views overweight negatively, and stereotypes the obese as stupid and lazy. Research shows that overweight children as young as age seven reflect these views. Although obese people can be happy with their weight, in many people it creates self-esteem problems and depression that feed the cycle of overeating and not getting enough exercise.

Being overweight can increase the risk for eating disorders including anorexia and bulimia. Low calorie diets further contribute to depression with:

- A sense of deprivation
- Preoccupation with food
- Interference with regular social activities
- Guilt from failing to diet and regaining weight

Patients suffering ill health also have more depression, and overweight is linked to a wide range of serious health conditions.

Overweight people are also less likely to exercise, so they don't get the psychological benefits and brain chemical stimulation of working out.

Physical Risks of Being Overweight

Obesity increases the risk of life-threatening conditions including:

- High blood pressure
- Angina and heart disease
- Some cancers
- Stroke
- Diabetes

Obesity is also connected with:

- Sleep apnea (interrupted breathing during sleep and heavy snoring)
- Trouble sleeping
- Shortness of breath and other respiratory problems
- Varicose veins
- Skin problems from moisture in folds of skin
- Gallstones
- Chronic low back pain
- Osteoarthritis in weight-bearing joints, especially the knees, and the wearing away of joint cartilage
- Gallbladder disease and gallstones

Extreme or morbid obesity (that is, being more than 100 pounds overweight) carries an extremely high risk of disease and early death.

Prevention

Prevention of obesity is important. Once fat cells form, they exist for life. Although dieting can force fat cells to release some of their contents, the cells remain.

Good health habits can prevent overweight, and help treat it once it exists:

- Seek a diet rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grain cereals and low-fat dairy foods
- Increase monounsaturated fats and reduce saturated fats
- Get regular aerobic exercise

Treatment

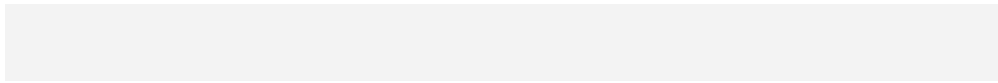
Being overweight can be a long-term problem, but a disciplined approach can make a big difference. It may be discouraging to try to lose all the weight, but you can get substantial health benefits from dropping just 10 to 20 pounds.

If you are overweight, long-term changes, with medical supervision, will spell success:

- Set reasonable goals, such as losing that first five pounds
- Keep careful track of what you're eating and learn to enjoy more healthy foods, including fresh or frozen vegetables, fruits and whole-grain breads
- Watch what you drink
- Eat slowly, and focus on eating
- Don't weigh yourself too often
- Take a daily multivitamin
- Get regular exercise

Ironically, very rapid weight loss can:

- Make gout and gallbladder disease temporarily worse for some people
- Make nutritional deficiencies more likely
- Cause you to lose muscle rather than fat



* IntelliHealth

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