

Obesity: What is it?

Overweight and obesity (oh-BEE-sit-ee) are a growing problem for adults and children in the U.S. You are overweight or obese if you weigh more than what is considered healthy for your height.

Most obesity is caused by taking in more calories than you use. Calories are the energy that food gives you. You use up calories by being active. A balanced meal gives your body the energy and nutrients it needs. If you eat more calories than your body needs, you gain weight. To lose weight, you need to eat fewer calories and be more active.

What Is BMI?

Doctors may look at your weight by using a number called “body mass index” (BMI). BMI is based on your weight and height. It can help your doctor better understand how much body fat you have:



- A person with a BMI between 25 and 29.9 is overweight
- A person with a BMI of 30 or higher is obese
- Talk to your doctor to find out what your BMI should be. You can also look on <http://www.nhlbisupport.com/bmi/bmicalc.htm>.

Change Behavior

If you are overweight or obese, it is important to make changes today so that you can live a healthier life.

Watch the amount, or “portions,” of food that you eat. Portions have grown larger over the years. A standard bagel used to be 2–3 oz. Now, many weigh up to 7 oz. Some meals served at restaurants are enough to feed a family of 6. Eating portions that are too large leads to weight gain. You gain weight when you eat more calories than your body uses. Fast food, packaged foods such as frozen meals, and sodas are easy and fast but are high in fat and calories.

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Eat Healthy Foods

- **Eat a diet low in fat.** Try not to eat fried foods. Eat broiled, baked, or grilled fish, skinless chicken, or skinless turkey. Eat only lean beef or pork; trim off fat. Use nonfat or lowfat milk and cheese. Use nonstick sprays for cooking.
- **Eat 5–9 servings of fruits and vegetables each day.** Snack on fruits and vegetables instead of chips, cookies, soda, and other high-fat or high-sugar foods.

Eat Less

Talk to your doctor about how many calories and servings you should eat each day. Read food labels and plan ahead for your meals. The American Heart Association suggests a daily meal plan that looks something like this:

Food Type	Number of Servings*	Sample Serving Size
Grains	6–8/day	1 slice bread; 1 oz. dry cereal; 1/2 cup cooked rice or pasta (about the size of a baseball)
Vegetables	3–5/day	1 cup raw, leafy (size of a small fist or 1/2 cup)
Fruits	4–5/day	1 medium fruit (about the size of a baseball); 1/4 cup dried fruit; 1/2 cup fruit juice

Food Type	Number of Servings*	Sample Serving Size
Fat-free or low-fat dairy	2–3/day	1 cup nonfat or low-fat milk or yogurt; 1-1/2 oz. nonfat or lowfat cheese (about the size of 6 stacked dice)
Lean meats, poultry, and seafood	3–6 ounces/day	3 oz. cooked meat (about the size of a computer mouse); 3 oz. cooked fish (about the size of a checkbook)
Fats and oils	2–3/day	1 Tbsp. mayonnaise; 1 tsp. oil
Nuts, seeds, and legumes	3–5/week	1/3 cup nuts; 1/2 cup dry beans or peas; 2 Tbsp. peanut butter
Sweets, and added sugars	0–5/week	1 Tbsp. sugar; 1 Tbsp. jam

* Based on 1,600–2,000 calories per day. Your doctor may tell you to eat a different number of servings per day.

Be More Active

Before you start exercising, see your doctor. Make it a goal to be active for 30 minutes on most days. Start slowly. Choose something that you enjoy. Some ideas are walking, swimming, dancing, hiking, and gardening.

Take a 30-minute walk on most days. You can break up your exercise. Walk for 10 minutes after breakfast, lunch, and dinner.