

When Is Being Overweight 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.

The health problems that stem from being overweight go way beyond the ones we usually hear about, like diabetes and heart diseases. Being overweight can also affect a person's joints, breathing, sleep, mood, and energy levels. So being overweight can impact a person's entire quality of life.

What is overweight? When people eat more calories than they burn off, 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 have a negative effect on a person's health. Doctors use the terms “overweight” or “obese” to describe when someone is at greatest risk of developing weight-related health problems.

As you've probably heard, more people are overweight today than ever before. Experts are calling this an “obesity epidemic.” This health problem affects young people as well as adults — one third of all kids between the ages of 2 and 19 are overweight or obese. So younger people are now developing health problems that used to affect only adults, like high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and type 2 diabetes.

Obesity tends to run in families. Some people have genetic tendency to gain weight more easily than other because they burn calories more slowly. During times when food was scarce, this was a real advantage. But now that food is available in most industrialized countries, an efficient metabolism that once ensured our survival now works to our disadvantage.

Although genes strongly influence body type and size, the environment also plays a role. People today may be gaining weight because of unhealthy food choice, like fast food, and family habits, like eating in front of the television 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.

Figuring out if a teen is overweight can be more complicated than it is for adults. That's because teens are still growing and developing. Doctors and other health care professionals often use a measurement called body mass index (BMI) to determine if someone is overweight.

Doctors consider a teen obese when his or her BMI number is higher than the BMI numbers of 95% of other teens the same age and gender. Someone whose BMI number is between 85% and 95% of the BMIs of other teens the same age and gender is overweight

Obesity is bad news for both body and mind. Not only can it make a person feel tired and uncomfortable, carrying extra weight puts added stress on the body, especially the bones and joints of the legs. As they get older, kids and teens who are overweight are more likely to develop diabetes and heart disease

Luckily, it's never too late to make changes that can effectively control weight 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, pass up on seconds, 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!

Questions:

1. There are many health problems that stem from being overweight. Which of the following is NOT mentioned in the speech?
2. According to the speech, what percentage of kids between the ages of 2 and 19 are overweight?
3. The speech mentions several factors contributing to obesity epidemic. Which of the following is NOT one of these factors?
4. Why is it more complicated to figure out if a teen is overweight than it is for adults?
5. Obesity may harm both body and mind in several ways. Which of the following is NOT one of these ways mentioned in the speech?

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