



**My health
on my terms
for obesity care**

The Facts in Front of You

Challenge
What You
Know
About
Obesity

**Union guide to understanding and
advocating for your obesity care**



Find these Facts Inside:

Obesity 101

Defines obesity as a chronic disease and explores its causes, including genetics, behavior, and environmental factors

1

Recognizing weight bias in the workplace

Offers practical tips on how to identify, address, and minimize weight bias and stigma in work environments

2

Taking action for obesity care

Working with your health care professional (HCP) to create a personalized obesity care plan using the four pillars of obesity care

3

Advocating for change through your union

Gives actionable questions to ask your employer, union representative, and insurance provider to advocate for improved obesity care

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PART 1: OBESITY 101



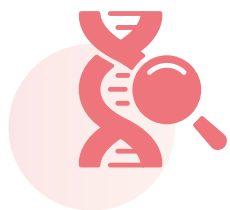
What is obesity?

Obesity is a long-term, but manageable, disease.^{1,2} Obesity happens when a high level of body fat affects your overall health.^{2,3}

What causes obesity?

For a while, researchers thought that obesity was simply caused by eating too much food and not getting enough physical activity.⁴ Now, we know it's much more complex, with many factors contributing to weight gain.^{2,4} Some of them are out of your control.²

There are 3 main factors that affect the likelihood of developing obesity:



Genetics

Some genes can increase your likelihood of gaining weight, feeling hungrier, and overeating^{1,5}



Habits (Behavioral)

Certain habits around eating, physical activity, and sleeping can lead to weight gain^{1,5}



Environment (Sociocultural)

Lack of safe places for outdoor activity, long commutes to work, and emotional stress add up to extra weight^{2,5}



DID YOU KNOW?

Low quality sleep can affect your weight¹



References:

1. <https://www.cdc.gov/obesity/php/about/index.html> (Accessed June 26, 2024).
2. <https://www.obesityaction.org/education-support/learn-about-obesity/causes/> (Accessed June 26, 2024).
3. <https://stop.publichealth.gwu.edu/understanding-obesity> (Accessed June 26, 2024).
4. <https://www.obesityaction.org/education-support/learn-about-obesity/common-myths/> (Accessed June 26, 2024).
5. <https://www.cdc.gov/obesity/php/about/risk-factors.html> (Accessed June 26, 2024).

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MYTH

VS

FACT

Obesity is caused by **poor personal choices**.¹

Obesity is caused by **genetic, environmental and behavioral factors**.^{2,3}

Everyone can lose weight with enough willpower²

Weight loss is not “one size fits all.” Obesity is not a choice, and success looks different for every patient.²

How is obesity diagnosed?

HCPs often use Body Mass Index, also called the BMI, to screen for obesity.⁴ The BMI factors in your height and weight to come up with a number.³

Underweight	Less than 18.5
Healthy Weight	18.5 to 24.9
Overweight	25.0 to 29.9
Obesity	30.0 to 39.9
Severe Obesity	40 or more

You can calculate your BMI using an online “BMI Calculator”

References:

- <https://www.obesityaction.org/education-support/learn-about-obesity/common-myths/> (Accessed June 26, 2024).
- Chaput, JP. *Can Fam Physician*. 2014;60(11):973-984.
- <https://www.obesityaction.org/education-support/learn-about-obesity/causes/> (Accessed June 26, 2024).
- <https://www.endocrinepractice.org/action/showPdf?pii=S1530-891X%2820%2939214-4> (Accessed June 26, 2024).

It's important to know that the BMI does not measure body fat directly.¹ So, using BMI on its own is not the best way to diagnose obesity. HCPs will look at factors like your age, gender, ethnicity, health and muscle mass.² They may also measure your waist or look at your waist-to-hip ratio to get a better understanding of abdominal fat.³



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✘
MYTH

VS

✔
FACT

✘

You can tell if someone is healthy by **looking** at them.²

✔

How someone looks does not give you an accurate picture of their health. There are many factors like **muscle mass, fitness level, and overall lifestyle** that give you more accurate information about someone's **health status**.²

How common is obesity?

About **2 out of every 5 adults in the US have obesity**, and many more have overweight.⁴

About 30% of workers live with obesity*:

32%
Construction

32%
Health Care & Social Assistance

28%
Education Services

33%
Manufacturing

36%
Public Administration

37%
Transportation & Warehousing

33%
Utilities

**Estimated using the 2015-2018 National Health Interview Survey data.⁵*

References:

1. <https://www.obesityaction.org/education-support/learn-about-obesity/causes/> (Accessed June 26, 2024).
2. <https://www.endocrinepractice.org/action/showPdf?pii=S1530-891X%2820%2939214-4> (Accessed June 26, 2024).
3. <https://stop.publichealth.gwu.edu/understanding-obesity> (Accessed June 26, 2024).
4. <https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/weight-management/choosing-a-safe-successful-weight-loss-program> (Accessed June 26, 2024).
5. <https://www.globaldata.com/health-economics/US/Employers/Overweight-Obesity-Impact-on-Employers.pdf> (Accessed June 26, 2024).

Is obesity related to other health conditions?

Obesity is related to several health conditions that can lower your quality of life and life expectancy.^{1,2} Health conditions related to obesity involve sleep apnea, joint pain, heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, depression, and some types of cancer.¹ Getting care or treatment for obesity can help improve a related condition.³



ON YOUR TERMS

Self-reflection questions:⁴

1. How do you feel about your current weight and overall health?
2. Have you noticed any changes in your energy levels or daily activities?
3. Have you tried to manage your weight in the past? If so, what strategies did or did not work for you?
4. Do you feel ready to seek support from a healthcare professional?

List of questions you can ask your HCP:⁵

- ✓ Is my weight affecting my health?
- ✓ What is a healthier weight for me?
- ✓ Do you have any resources or treatment recommendations for me?

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1. <https://www.obesityaction.org/education-support/learn-about-obesity/related-conditions/> (Accessed June 26, 2024).
2. <https://www.cdc.gov/obesity/data/adult.html> (Accessed June 26, 2024).
3. Fastenau J, et al. *Clin Obes*. 2019;9(3):e12309.
4. <https://www.aace.com/patient-journey/obesity/questions> (Accessed June 26, 2024).
5. <https://health.gov/myhealthfinder/health-conditions/obesity/losing-weight-questions-doctor> (Accessed June 26, 2024).



PART 2: RECOGNIZING WEIGHT BIAS IN THE WORKPLACE

What is weight bias?

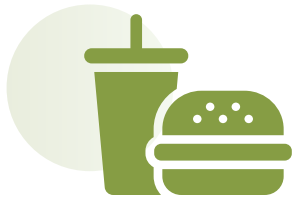
Weight bias is when people have negative attitudes and beliefs about people who have excess weight or obesity.¹ The negative attitudes and beliefs cause them to behave unfairly toward people for having excess weight.²

How can you recognize weight bias at work?

Weight bias happens in many places, including work.² Discrimination based on a person's weight or body size is more common than age or gender discrimination in the workplace.² **In fact, 12% of workers say they have faced weight discrimination at work.**³

When you notice weight bias in the workplace, report it to your employer.

Weight bias can take different forms.¹ Some forms of weight bias at work are:



Judging workers for choosing fast food^{4,5}



Providing uniform sizes that don't accommodate all body sizes comfortably⁶



Financial penalties, such as higher healthcare costs for being overweight²

How does weight bias affect people with excess weight?

The social stigma of obesity can make some people feel depressed, anxious, and rejected. Weight bias and stigma can cause people to engage in unhealthy practices like extreme dieting and binge eating. It also might make them avoid physical activity and medical care.⁷

References:

1. <https://www.obesityaction.org/advocacy/what-we-fight-for/weight-bias> (Accessed June 26, 2024).
2. <https://www.obesityaction.org/wp-content/uploads/Weight-Bias-in-the-Workplace.pdf> (Accessed June 26, 2024).
3. <https://www.shrm.org/about/press-room/new-shrm-research-details-weight-discrimination-in-the-workplace#> (Accessed June 26, 2024).
4. Gupta CC, et al. *Ind Health*. 2019;57(4):419-453 [Table 1, 424-434].
5. Cultural Competence. *Food Shame at Work: An Oft-Overlooked Employee Experience*. Gallup; 2022. Accessed September 26, 2024. <https://news.gallup.com/podcast/397910/food-shame-work-oft-overlooked-employee-experience.aspx?version=print>
6. Gonzales, M. *SHRM*; 2024. Accessed September 26, 2024. <https://www.shrm.org/topics-tools/news/all-things-work/confronting-weight-bias>
7. <https://www.obesityaction.org/get-educated/public-resources/brochures-guides/understanding-obesity-stigma-brochure/> (Accessed September 5, 2024).



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What can your employer do to help reduce weight bias?

Some ways employers can reduce workplace weight bias are by:

1

Providing diversity training for employees that includes differences in body weight¹

2

Providing body weight sensitivity training for managers and human resources staff¹

3

Making sure “body weight” is added to the workplace anti-bullying policy¹

How can you help reduce weight bias?

An important step in reducing weight bias is to acknowledge it when it happens. Make a point of noticing weight bias when it occurs in the news, on social media, or in something you or your coworker says. You can practice identifying and using **people-first language** when talking about obesity.²

What is people-first language?

Instead of labeling someone as their disease, for example “obese worker”, **people-first language** puts the person before their disease.³

Here are some examples:⁴



**Avoid terms like...
Extra large, fat, chubby, thick, obese**



**Consider instead...
Person with obesity**

A worker with obesity or a **worker affected by obesity** *instead of* an obese worker⁴

References:

1. <https://www.obesityaction.org/wp-content/uploads/Weight-Bias-in-the-Workplace.pdf> (Accessed June 26, 2024).

2. <https://www.obesityaction.org/advocacy/what-we-fight-for/weight-bias> (Accessed June 26, 2024).

3. <https://www.obesityaction.org/action-through-advocacy/weight-bias/people-first-language/> (Accessed June 26, 2024).

4. Brown A, et al. *EClinicalMedicine*. 2022;47:101408.



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The words we use to describe people living with overweight or obesity can deeply impact them and add to the bias and stigma based on body size.^{1,2} By using people-first language, you can help remove weight bias and weight stigma.³

Work with your union to navigate this process and learn how to talk to your employer about creating a supportive work environment. Your union is there to help you.



ON YOUR TERMS

Did you know?

A person can have weight bias toward oneself. This is called internalized weight bias.⁴

Reflecting on your own internalized weight bias can help you understand your bias and recognize how it's impacting you. For example, you might feel self-conscious buying a treat while grocery shopping. Reflecting on this can help you understand how internalized weight bias affects your behavior and self-esteem.⁴

Use the questions below to think about your personal experience.

- ✓ Have I internalized any societal messages about weight? How has this affected my self-esteem?
- ✓ How do I speak about my own body? Can I make my language more positive?
- ✓ Have I ever judged someone based on their weight? What feelings led to that judgement?



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1. https://obesitycanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Obesity-Language-Matters_FINAL-2.pdf (Accessed June 26, 2024).
2. Kyle TK, Puhl RM. *Obesity* (Silver Spring). 2014;22(5):1211
3. <https://www.obesityaction.org/action-through-advocacy/weight-bias/people-first-language/> (Accessed June 26, 2024).
4. Brown A, et al. *EClinicalMedicine*. 2022;47:101408.



PART 3: TAKING ACTION FOR OBESITY CARE

What can you do to care for yourself?

The exact type of obesity care varies from person to person.¹ It's important that your obesity care plan has been studied scientifically and is customized to your needs using the 4 pillars of obesity care.² Because there is no single obesity care plan that will work for everybody, it's important to talk to your HCP about creating your customized plan.¹

What are the 4 pillars of obesity care?

The 4 pillars of a customized obesity care plan involve:



Behavior Changes

Changing behavior involves understanding the mental and emotional reasons for your habits and finding ways to build healthier habits²



Physical Activity

From daily movement to structured exercise, a physical activity plan factors in your abilities and what you like to do²



Nutrition

Nutrition counseling helps you come up with food choices that are doable and reasonable for you²



Medication and/or Surgery

Obesity medication and surgery have been shown to help some people lose weight, maintain weight loss, and change the way they eat²

For more information on nutrition and healthy food choices, visit eatright.org, a trusted resource for advice and practical tips.



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1. <https://www.obesityaction.org/education-support/treatment/> (Accessed June 26, 2024).
2. <https://obesitymedicine.org/about/four-pillars/> (Accessed June 26, 2024).



Besides weight loss, what are some other benefits to obesity care?

The focus of obesity care doesn't always have to be on weight loss.¹ Obesity care can offer many other benefits. Weight loss may prevent or reduce comorbid conditions like sleep apnea, joint pain, and type 2 diabetes. You may find yourself feeling more energetic and enjoying an overall improvement in your well-being.^{1,2} These benefits can help you enjoy doing the activities you love more often, like spending time with your family or friends, playing sports, going to community events, attending a place of worship, hiking and more.

How can I manage my weight long-term?

Obesity care doesn't stop after weight loss. You should work with your healthcare team to develop a plan that is right for you.³

Remember, if you follow a weight loss program, talk to your HCP about a plan to keep the weight off.⁴



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MYTH	VS	FACT
Obesity treatments work for everyone.		Different obesity care methods work for everyone. Your obesity care plan should be individualized based on your needs and could include a combination of diet, physical activity, behavioral therapy and sometimes medication or surgery. ⁵
You need to lose large amounts of body weight to see health benefits.		Weight reduction does not have to be drastic. Losing just 5% to 10% of your weight can greatly improve your overall health. ⁷

References:

1. Fastenau J, et al. *Clin Obes.* 2019;9(3):e12309.
2. <https://stop.publichealth.gwu.edu/fast-facts/benefits-weight-loss> (Accessed June 26, 2024).
3. <https://www.obesityaction.org/resources/access-to-obesity-care-what-do-we-mean-and-how-are-we-seeking-it/> (Accessed June 26, 2024).
4. <https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/weight-management/choosing-a-safe-successful-weight-loss-program> (Accessed June 26, 2024).
5. <https://obesitymedicine.org/about/four-pillars/> (Accessed June 26, 2024).
6. <https://www.obesityaction.org/education-support/treatment/> (Accessed June 26, 2024).
7. Ryan DH, Yockey SR. *Curr Obes Resp.* 2017;6(2):187-194.





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1. Set specific and realistic goals

• Here are some examples of short and long-term goals to inspire you:

Short-term goal



Make an HCP appointment



Take a 15-minute walk after a meal



Take the stairs instead of the escalator or elevator



Prepare meals for busy days



Drink a glass of water before each meal

Long-term goal



Work with your HCP to develop an obesity care plan that is customized to your needs



Incorporate regular physical activity into your routine



Track your progress and adjust your goals as needed

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2. Build a support system



Partner with a family member or friend who shares similar health goals



Schedule regular physical activity or walking sessions together



Share your goals and progress to stay motivated and accountable

3. Prepare for your HCP's appointment

- Your HCP may ask about your medical history, including your body weight and previous experience or attempts at weight loss. They might ask how your body weight is affecting you physically, emotionally, and professionally.¹
- Make a list of questions you want to ask. If you're not sure where to start, you may want to use these questions to begin the conversation:

1

How does my weight affect my health?²

2

Would losing weight improve my health?³

3

What type of weight loss program (if any) would you recommend for me?²

- Remember, it's important for you to feel comfortable having open and supportive conversations with your HCP. If you ever feel blamed or unsupported, it's okay to get a second opinion. Your health and well-being are important.

References:

1. <https://www.aace.com/patient-journey/obesity/contemplation/how-to-talk-to-your-health-care-professional> (Accessed June 26, 2024).
2. <https://health.gov/myhealthfinder/health-conditions/obesity/losing-weight-questions-doctor> (Accessed June 26, 2024).
3. Fastenau J, et al. *Clin Obes.* 2019;9(3):e12309.

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4. Track your progress



Keep track of your weight and monitor how you're feeling



Reflecting on your progress can help you spot challenges and work with your HCP to make any needed adjustments¹

5. Celebrate your success

Recognize all your accomplishments along the way. Even the small victories, like meeting a short-term goal, deserve to be acknowledged.¹



References:

1. <https://www.aace.com/patient-journey/obesity/care-and-continuity> (Accessed June 26, 2024).



PART 4: ADVOCATING FOR CHANGE THROUGH YOUR UNION



Who is an obesity care advocate?

An advocate is someone who supports a cause by working with people to make positive changes in society.¹ Advocates for obesity care can even advocate for themselves.² You don't need any special qualifications – just basic knowledge of obesity. You can do this by learning facts about obesity—including the risks—and the options for obesity care.² It's not a lot of work but can make a difference.

Obesity care advocates can also talk to their health insurers and employers about what they need.² Your union representative and labor union can help you do this.

What are some other ways to advocate for obesity care?

Outside of your workplace, you can advocate for obesity care by reaching out to:



Legislators

Your legislators are your elected officials who make decisions about the laws.

How to get in touch

Connect with them by mail, email, phone, and in person.²



Regulators

Your regulators work for government health agencies and have a say in how health care is provided.²

How to get in touch

Communicate with regulators by providing your comments on proposed healthcare regulations.²



News Media

Reporters and journalists in your local media can affect how obesity issues are viewed by the community.²

How to get in touch

Contact your local media outlets to share your story or concerns.²



General Public

Spread true information about obesity care and share your story with your community.²

How to get in touch

Ask to speak at your place of worship or volunteer club and post about obesity care and on social media.²

References:

1. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/advocate> (Accessed June 26, 2024).
2. <https://www.obesityaction.org/action-center/learn-about-taking-action/getting-started-as-an-advocate/> (Accessed June 26, 2024).

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To start advocating for obesity care, here are some questions you can ask:

Your employer

Could the company provide **healthier snack** options?

Are there plans to ensure that **uniforms** are available in more sizes to accommodate all employees?

Is “body weight” included in the workplace **anti-bullying policy**?¹

Do you offer **diversity training** for employees that includes differences in body weight?¹

Can we offer more **seating options** at work to accommodate those with different body sizes?

Do you require **body weight sensitivity training** for managers and human resources staff?¹

Your union representative

Are there any initiatives to reduce **weight bias and stigma** in the workplace?

How does the union advocate for **health insurance coverage** for obesity care and related conditions?

Are there any **policies to support employees** with obesity or related conditions?

Does the union **involve members** in the decision-making process related to **obesity care and health insurance coverage**?



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1. <https://www.obesityaction.org/wp-content/uploads/Weight-Bias-in-the-Workplace.pdf> (Accessed June 26, 2024).





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Your insurance provider

Are there any steps to take before employees are considered for **obesity care coverage**?¹

Is there a chance an employee would be **denied coverage**?¹

Does the employee policy cover obesity **medication or surgery**?¹

What else should employees know about **obesity care coverage**?¹

Does the employee policy cover services to visit a **nutritionist or dietician, behavioral counseling**, and subsidies for **fitness programs**?



DID YOU KNOW?

Advocacy works. The more voices that join the conversation, the more likely change will happen. **Make your voice heard.**

References:
1. <https://www.aace.com/patient-journey/obesity/questions> (Accessed June 26, 2024).



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More resources for obesity care advocacy

Here are some online resources to support your advocacy for obesity care in the workplace:

Centers for Disease Control

cdc.gov/obesity

National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases

niddk.nih.gov/health-information/weight-management

Obesity Action Coalition

obesityaction.org



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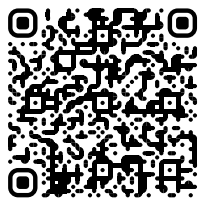




What will you do

TODAY

to advocate for obesity care?



Scan for
additional
resources



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2. Statista Research Department. *Statista. Industries in the US with the highest percentage of employees who were overweight or obese as of 2015*. Published May 7, 2015. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/683775/industries-with-most-overweight-or-obese-employees-united-states/>
3. SHRM. *New SHRM research details weight discrimination in the workplace*. Published May 8, 2023. <https://www.shrm.org/about/press-room/new-shrm-research-details-weight-discrimination-in-the-workplace>

