



**HEALTH MATTERS - WEIGHT MANAGEMENT**

In the fourth edition of my regular health articles I thought I would look at obesity - as it is a subject very close to my own heart and something I struggle to get to grips with on a personal level.

**Obesity is a term used to describe somebody who is very overweight, with a lot of body fat.**

**Defining obesity**

There are many ways in which a person's health in relation to their weight can be classified, but the most widely used method is Body Mass Index (BMI).  BMI is a measure of whether you're a healthy weight for your height.  To calculate this divide your weight in kilograms by your height in metres, then divide the answer by your height again and this will give you your BMI.

For most adults:

* **a BMI of 25 to 29.9 means you are considered overweight**
* **a BMI of 30 to 39.9 means you are considered obese**
* **a BMI of 40 or above means you are considered severely obese**

BMI is not used to definitively diagnose obesity - as people who are very muscular sometimes have a high BMI, without excess fat - but for most people it can be a useful indication of whether they may be overweight.

A better measure of excess fat is waist circumference, and this can be used as an additional measure in people who are overweight (with a BMI of 25 to 29.9) or moderately obese (with a BMI of 30 to 34.9).

Generally, men with a waist circumference of 94cm or more and women with a waist circumference of 80cm or more are more likely to develop obesity-related health problems.

**Risks of obesity**

Taking steps to tackle obesity is important because, in addition to causing obvious physical changes, it can lead to a number of serious and potentially life-threatening conditions, such as:

* [***Type 2 diabetes***](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Diabetes-type2/Pages/Introduction.aspx)
* [***Coronary heart disease***](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Coronary-heart-disease/Pages/Introduction.aspx)
* ***Some types of cancer, such as***[***breast cancer***](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Cancer-of-the-breast-female/Pages/Introduction.aspx) ***and***[***bowel cancer***](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Cancer-of-the-colon-rectum-or-bowel/Pages/Introduction.aspx)
* [***Stroke***](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Stroke/Pages/Introduction.aspx)

Obesity can also affect your quality of life and lead to psychological problems, such as low self-esteem or [depression](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/depression/Pages/Introduction.aspx?WT.mc_id=61006).

### Causes of obesity

Obesity is generally caused by consuming more calories - particularly those in fatty and sugary foods - than you burn off through physical activity. The excess energy is then stored by the body as fat.

Obesity is an increasingly common problem, because many modern lifestyles often promote eating excessive amounts of cheap, high-calorie food and spending a lot of time sitting at desks, on sofas or in cars.

There are also some underlying health conditions that can occasionally contribute to weight gain, such as an underactive thyroid gland ([hypothyroidism](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Thyroid-under-active/Pages/Introduction.aspx)), although conditions such as this don’t usually cause weight problems if they are effectively controlled with medication.

**Treating obesity**

The best way to treat obesity is to eat a healthy, reduced-calorie diet and to exercise regularly. To do this you should:

* Eat a balanced, calorie-controlled diet as recommended by a health professional.
* Take up activities such as fast walking, jogging, swimming or an active sport for 3 to 5 hours  each week
* Eat slowly and avoid situations where you know you could be tempted to overeat

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There is no ‘quick fix’ for obesity.  Regularly monitoring your weight, setting realistic goals and involving your friends and family with your attempts to lose weight can help. Remember that even losing what seems like a small amount of weight (such as 3% or more of your original body weight), and maintaining this for life, can significantly reduce your risk of obesity-related complications like diabetes and heart disease.  If you are interested in losing weight, do contact the Health Promotion Team - Health Promotion Trainer, Marian Kanes or Health Promotion Coordinator, Marian Yon on Tel. 22500 ext 305 or 329.

That’s it for this week.  Until next time,

**Marian Kanes**

**Health Promotion Trainer**

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