

Here are some factors that may have led to your weight gain:

- You ate too much.
- You drank too much.
- You moved too little.
- You ate too many of the wrong foods, like high-calorie, high-fat foods, fast foods or deserts.
- You didn't eat enough of the right kind of foods, such as high-fiber, unprocessed, raw or lightly cooked foods.
 - You have a health condition—such as diabetes or hypothyroidism—that does not let your body process food properly.
 - You have a health condition—such as arthritis, bronchitis or a heart condition—that keeps you from moving around enough to burn calories.
- You take certain medications, that make you pack on the pounds.
 - You sit too long on your job or in front of the television.
 - You eat when you are bored, sad or lonely.
 - You are over 40, but eat and drink like you did when you were 20.

By Paula Hartman Cohen

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Source: Marsha Marcus, Ph.D., Professor, Department of Psychiatry, School of Medicine, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, PA; Judith Matz, L.C.S.W., therapist specializing in treating eating disorders, author of *The Diet Survivor's Handbook: 60 Lessons in Eating, Acceptance and Self Care*, Skokie, IL.

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Resources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

<http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/obesity/facts.htm>

National Institutes of Health
<http://win.niddk.nih.gov/statistics/index.htm#overweight>

Obesity Society
<http://www.obesity.org/news-center/the-obesity-epidemic.htm>

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In The Spotlight...



Obesity: What Is It?



- It is a serious health condition.
- It does not develop overnight.
- It can be treated.

What Is Obesity?

You may have noticed you can't get into last year's swimsuit. Or the pants you love just don't look good on you anymore. Face it, you have gained weight. It doesn't take long for clothes to get tight when you gain weight. You can't blame your dryer for shrinking your clothes anymore.

If you are worried about your weight, you are not alone. In the US, more than 1 in 3 adults and children are overweight. On top of that, another 1 in 3 adults and 1 in 6 children are obese.

Weight comes and goes as we age. Or if we change our diet or lifestyle. Some weight change is seasonal and nothing to worry about. For example, people are less active in winter, so may gain weight. But when your extra weight stays on, it's time to take action.

How much weight is too much?

You will know. You will need to buy new clothes. Your shoe size might change. You might not have as much energy. Or your knees or hips hurt.

Being fat or thin is more than just looking good. Too much weight can be unhealthy. Or, it can be a health risk, all by itself.



Think about it. The parts of your body that keep you moving and thinking do not grow in size just because you've gained weight. Your heart, lungs and brain stay the same size. When you add 10 percent or 20 percent to your weight, you put more strain on your body. Your heart, back, knees, hips and feet take a beating. All those extra pounds affect the rest of your body. If you've gained more than that, you risk serious health problems.

If you are worried, see your doctor.

To decide just how serious the weight gain is, your doctor will consider your sex, age, height and weight. You may have other health problems that cause weight gain. And some medicines cause weight gain.

Women usually have more fat than men. And men have more muscle than women. The doctor will weigh you, measure your height, and measure your muscle and fat. Then she'll compare your height to your weight. That exam will help her decide how serious your weight gain is.

If you are slim everywhere but in a few spots, you may be overweight but not obese. With some dieting and exercise, you can get back to normal. You just need to lose a few pounds.

But, if your extra weight comes from a layer of fat spread over your entire body, you are probably obese. You don't just need to lose weight. You need to lose fat, too. And if, on top of your larger body, you have even larger arms, legs or hips, you could be morbidly obese. This is a very serious medical condition. You need to be seen by a doctor right away. You need to lose a lot of weight and of course most of the fat.

Obesity means you are 20 percent or more above normal weight.

The most common way to learn if a person is overweight or obese is the body mass index or BMI. A person is considered overweight if his BMI is between 25 and 29.9. A person is obese if her BMI is over 30.

What makes a person obese?

Obesity doesn't happen overnight. It doesn't happen after a week of eating holiday cookies. It takes a long time to pack on pounds, especially pounds made up of fat. The weight gain may happen very slowly. So slowly that a person doesn't notice until the situation is out of hand.

Until about 100 years ago, the only people who were obese were those with health problems. Life was hard and food was costly. Few people could afford to overeat. Whatever someone ate was quickly burned off during the day. People didn't have dishwashers, cars, or TV's. They burned calories by walking; washing



and hanging clothes to dry; taking care of animals, crops and children; or lifting heavy objects on the job. Sweets and rich foods were saved for holidays and special days.

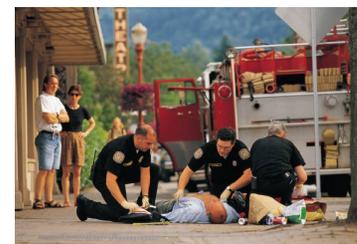
Today, we have modern appliances and conveniences. We barely work up a sweat in the house or on the job. Food is prepared quickly and readily available, even if it is not always healthy. And, food choices are almost endless. We don't have to wait for a special occasion to eat cake or ice cream. If we want to, we can make every day a feast day. And, unfortunately, many of us do.

Excess weight can affect every part of our life. In today's world, people who are thin are seen as pretty, smart and healthy. People who are overweight are seen as fat and lazy. Overweight people are often discriminated against in school and on the job. People carrying extra pounds may feel rejected, ashamed or depressed.



Why worry?

People who are overweight and obese are at risk for getting high blood pressure, pre-diabetes and diabetes, bone and joint problems. They may also get heart problems, stroke, mental health problems and some cancers.



Think about it: If you pile too many rocks on a small wooden table, what happens? The table crumbles. All the weight you have packed on will cause problems on your own frame, while it stresses the organs that work to keep you healthy.

If you are overweight, obese, or morbidly obese, you can work with your doctor to find a healthy solution to your weight problem. Not only will your health improve, but you will feel better too.