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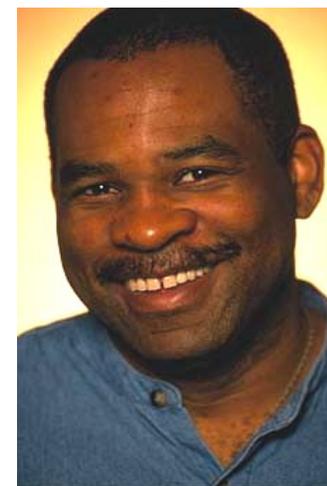


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## Understanding Adult Obesity

## The Health Education Network



The Health Education Network is a Program of the Minority Organ Donation Education Program, Inc.

## Adult Obesity

More than 60 percent of Americans aged 20 years and older are overweight. Seventy-five percent of African American females, and fifty percent of African American males, and one-quarter of American adults are obese. This puts them at an increased risk for chronic diseases such as:

- Heart disease
- Type 2 diabetes
- High blood pressure
- Stroke
- Some forms of cancer

This information provides basic information about obesity: What is it? How is it measured? What causes it? What are the health risks? What can you do about it?

To most people the term “obesity” means to be overweight. Health professionals define “overweight” as an excess amount of body weight that includes muscle, bone, fat, and water. “Obesity” specifically refers to an excess amount of body fat. Some people, such as bodybuilders or other athletes with a lot of muscle, can be overweight without being obese.

Everyone needs a certain amount of body fat for stored energy, heat insulation, shock absorption, and other functions. As a rule, women have more body fat than men. Most health care providers agree that men with more than 25 percent body fat and women with more than 30 percent body fat are obese.

Health care providers are concerned not only with how much fat a person has, but also where the fat is located on the body. Women typically collect fat in their hips and buttocks, giving them a “pear” shape. Men usually build up fat around their bellies, giving them more of an “apple” shape. Of course some men are pear-shaped and some women apple-shaped, especially after menopause. If you carry fat mainly around your waist, you are more likely to develop obesity related health problems. Women with a waist measurement of more than 35 inches or men with a waist measurement of more than 40 inches have a higher health risk because of their fat distribution.

In scientific term, obesity occurs when a person consumes more calories than he or she burns. What causes the imbalance between calories in and calories out may differ from one person to another. Genetic, environmental, psychological, and other factors may all play a part.

### Genetic Factors

Obesity tends to run in families, suggesting a genetic cause. Yet families also share diet and lifestyle habits that may contribute to obesity. Separating this from genetic factors is often difficult. Even so, science shows that heredity is linked to obesity.

### Environmental Factors

Genes do not destine people to a lifetime of obesity, however. Environment also strongly influences obesity. This includes lifestyle behaviors such as what a person eats and his or her level of physical activity.

Americans tend to eat high-fat foods, and put taste and convenience ahead of nutrition. Also, most Americans do not get enough physical activity.

Although you cannot change your genetic makeup, you can change your eating habits and levels of activity. Try these techniques that have helped some people lose weight and keep it off:

- Learn how to choose more nutritious meals that are lower in fat.
- Learn to recognize and control environment cues (like inviting smells) that make you eat when you’re not hungry.
- Become more physically active
- Keep records of your food intake and physical activity.

### Health Risks

Obesity is more than a cosmetic problem; it is a health hazard. Approximately 280,000 adult deaths in the United States each year related to obesity. Several serious health problems have been linked to obesity, including type-2 diabetes; heart disease; high blood pressure; and stroke. Obesity is also linked to higher rates of certain types of cancer. Obese men are more likely than non-obese men to die from cancer of the colon, rectum, or prostate. Obese women are more likely than non-obese women to die from cancer of the gallbladder, breast, uterus, cervix, or ovaries.

**Source: The National institute of Health**