

For appointments and enquiries,
please call the CGH Appointment Centre at
Tel: (65) 6850 3333

CGH Appointment Centre operating hours:

8.30 am to 8.00 pm (Monday to Friday)
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For more information, please visit
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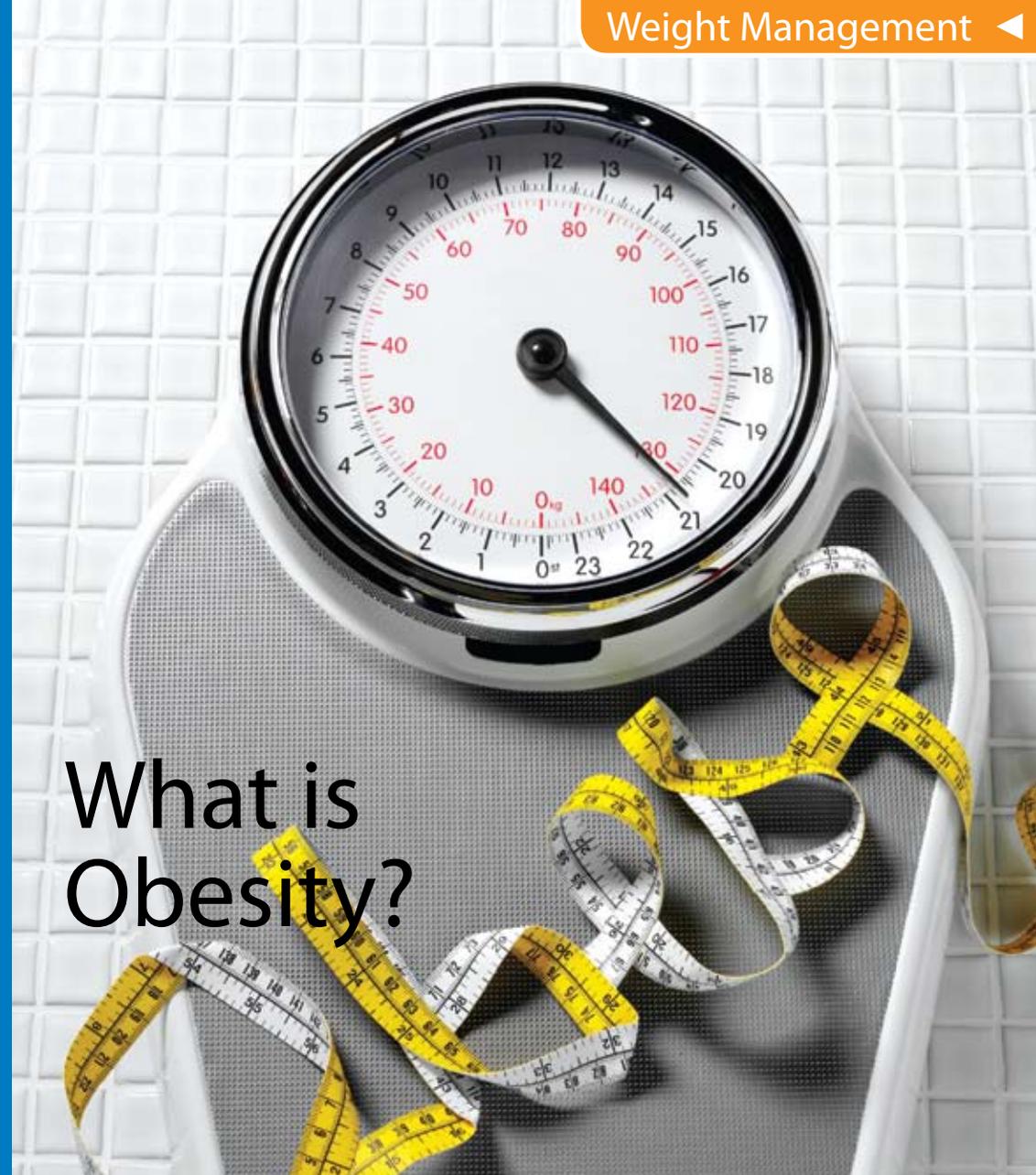


2 Simei Street 3 Singapore 529889
Tel: 6788 8833 Fax: 6788 0933 www.cgh.com.sg
Reg No 198904226R

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Frequently Asked Questions About Obesity



What is obesity?

Obesity is a condition of excess or abnormal storage of fat in the body which is harmful to health. The most widely used method of defining whether someone is obese is the **body mass index (BMI)**: $BMI = \text{weight (kg)} / [\text{height (m)} \times \text{height (m)}]$

BMI in kg/m ²	Weight category*
≥ 30	obese
25-29.9	overweight
18.5-24.9	healthy weight
< 18.5	underweight

*According to the World Health Organization for adults aged 18-69

For the same BMI, Asians have more body fat compared to Caucasians, and are at higher risk of developing diabetes and heart disease at $BMI \geq 23 \text{ kg/m}^2$. The risk increases with higher BMI, especially at $BMI \geq 27.5 \text{ kg/m}^2$.

A large **waist circumference (abdominal obesity)** also increases the risk of heart disease and diabetes. Larger waist circumference means that there is more fat stored in the abdomen. Fat storage inside the abdomen interferes with the function of the heart, liver and other vital organs. The risk of heart disease and other illnesses related to obesity is increased above a certain waist circumference (see table).

Population	Average waist circumference	
	Men	Women
Caucasians	≥ 102 cm	≥ 88 cm
Asians	≥ 90 cm	≥ 80 cm

A person has abdominal obesity if his/her waist circumference is above the cut-off in the table. This cut-off is different in men and women, and is lower in Asians than in Caucasians.

Why is being obese a problem?

Many illnesses are being associated with overweight and obesity. In many cases, the risk of developing these problems increases with increasing weight. These include:

- Diabetes and its complications such as kidney disease, blindness, poor circulation and leg ulcers
- Heart disease
- Stroke
- Hypertension (high blood pressure)
- High cholesterol
- Snoring and sleep apnoea (heavy snoring, breathing difficulties leading to sudden waking during sleep, feeling tired, falling asleep and unable to concentrate in the day)
- Certain types of cancer
- Erectile dysfunction and decreased fertility in men

- Polycystic ovarian syndrome in women (menstrual irregularities, decreased fertility)
- Joint problems and decreased mobility
- Psychological problems such as anxiety and depression

“I don’t eat very much, so why am I obese?”

Weight gain is due to an imbalance between the amount of energy intake and energy used by the body. Although you may be eating less than your family or friends, you will gain weight if your body uses less energy than you take in with your food and drinks. Lifestyle factors are the most common causes of obesity. These include

- Eating large portions and snacking in between meals
- Eating food rich in fat and sugar, including soft drinks and fruit juice concentrates
- Sedentary job
- Lack of exercise

People with a family history of overweight and obesity are more likely to become obese. Certain illnesses and medications can also lead to weight gain. Your doctor can do a check-up on the causes of weight gain, and start you on a weight management plan and specific treatment for obesity-related health problems.

How can I start to control my weight?

- 1) Know your BMI: weight (in kg) divided by [height x height] (m²)

- 2) Know how much weight to lose, and over how long: target BMI range 20-25, but no more than 1-1.5 kg per week
 - rate of weight loss also depends on how overweight you are e.g. an 80 kg person would lose weight more slowly than a 100 kg person
- 3) Find out your activity level (according to job and leisure time) and daily energy needs
- 4) Record your eating and activity pattern (light, moderate or heavy) to estimate your energy intake and expenditure

From here you can modify your diet and activity to lose weight.

How can I lose weight and maintain a healthy weight?

Regardless of the cause of weight gain, monitoring food intake and increasing physical activity will help in losing excess weight and maintaining a healthy weight. Reduction of about 10% of weight over 3-6 months cuts down the risk of obesity-related illness in overweight and obese people, even if the healthy target weight cannot be achieved. You can control your weight using:

- **Diet**
 - Cut down fat and carbohydrate in your diet
 - Take more fruits, vegetables and whole grains
 - Eat in moderation and avoid snacking

Crash diets are dangerous to health and cannot be sustained in the long-term. Diets that are low-fat or low-carbohydrate have been shown to reduce weight, but their long-term effects are not known. A dietician can help you to plan a balanced diet with fewer calories to achieve weight loss and maintenance.

- Exercise

- Include regular physical activity in your daily routine, like climbing stairs instead of taking the lift
- Do moderate-intensity physical activity for 30 minutes 5 days a week, such as brisk walking, cycling or badminton

As your fitness level improves, you can do more intensive exercise such as jogging or swimming for at least 20 minutes 3 days a week. Do activities that you enjoy with family and friends so that you can motivate each other.

- Medication

Doctors may prescribe medication for people who are obese. These medications are used for short-(6-12 months) and long (up to 3 years)-term weight control, in combination with diet modification and exercise.

- Bariatric surgery

Bariatric surgery is done to produce a large amount of weight loss in very obese people with weight-related illnesses when all other serious attempts at weight loss have failed. As surgery may not be suitable for all obese people, your doctor is the best person to advise if you should be referred to a bariatric surgeon.

Self-motivation is the key to successful weight loss and long-term weight maintenance.

How do I motivate myself to keep to my weight loss plan?

- **Set realistic goals:** for example, target weight loss of 1 kg a week
- **Reward yourself when you reach a weight goal:** treat yourself to an outing, or bring your family out for a meal
- **Make healthy eating and exercise a part of your lifestyle and involve your family and friends**
- **Visualise a slimmer and healthier you**
- Even if you miss exercise sessions or can't follow your diet for some time, **think positive and resume your plans as soon as you can**

The six habits of highly effective weight control

Six key strategies have been identified for long-term successful weight loss and maintenance:

- 1) Continuing regular physical activity
- 2) Eating a low-calorie, low-fat diet
- 3) Eating breakfast
- 4) Having a consistent eating pattern
- 5) Monitoring your own weight regularly
- 6) Early prevention of small weight gains - for instance by eating fewer calories and increasing exercise

For more information on weight management, please visit myhealth.sg