

Screening for and Management of Obesity in Adults

The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force) has issued a **final** recommendation on *Screening for and Management of Obesity in Adults*.

This recommendation is for adults ages 18 and older.

The Task Force reviewed research studies on screening for and managing obesity.

The recommendation summarizes what it learned about the potential benefits and harms of screening: Clinicians should screen all adults for obesity and offer or refer those who are obese to weight management programs. This fact sheet explains the recommendation and what it might mean for you.

What is obesity?

Obesity refers to a person's overall body weight and whether it is too high. Obesity means having a high amount of extra body fat.

Facts About Obesity

Obesity is a serious problem in the United States. More than one-third of American adults are now obese. People who are obese are more likely to develop heart disease, diabetes, and some cancers, as well as to die early. Losing weight can reduce the risk for illness and early death and improve overall health.

Many factors determine whether a person will become obese. Americans now live in an environment that encourages us to eat too much and discourages us from being physically active. Families, communities, employers, government, and the medical system all have a role to play in helping people achieve and maintain a healthy weight.

Screening for and Managing Obesity

When you visit your health care professional, he or she usually weighs you and measures your height. These two numbers are used to calculate your body mass index (BMI). BMI indicates whether you are at a healthy weight or whether you are overweight or obese. The higher your BMI, the higher your risk for certain diseases such as heart disease, high blood pressure, and diabetes.

Weight Category	BMI	Examples
Healthy weight	18.5 to 24.9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A woman 5'5" tall and 132 lbs has a BMI of 22. A man 5'11" tall and 172 lbs has a BMI of 24.
Overweight	25 to 29.9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A woman 5'3" tall and 163 lbs has a BMI of 29. A man 5'9" tall and 176 lbs has a BMI of 26.
Obese	30 or greater	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A woman 5'6" and 198 lbs has a BMI of 33. A man 6'1" and 250 lbs has a BMI of 35.

Your health care professional also might want to measure the size of your waist (your waist circumference). This can help screen for possible health risks that develop when a person is overweight or obese. If most of your fat is around your waist rather than around your hips, you are at higher risk for heart disease and diabetes.

If your health care professional finds that you are obese, he or she may suggest that you join a weight management program. Even modest weight loss can reduce health risks in people who are obese.

Many programs have been developed to help people lose weight, and evidence shows that intensive programs that include a variety of activities are successful in helping people manage their weight. These programs:

- **include 12 to 26 sessions in the first year**
- **include group and/or individual sessions**
- **help people make healthy eating choices**
- **include physical activity**
- **address issues that make it difficult to change behaviors**
- **help people monitor their own behaviors**
- **help people develop strategies to maintain healthy eating and physical activity behaviors**

Potential Benefits and Harms

The main potential benefits of behavior change programs are to help obese people change their eating and physical activity behaviors, lose weight, and reduce their risk for diseases such as heart disease, high blood pressure, and diabetes. The Task Force found that intensive, comprehensive programs led to modest weight loss and improved risk factors for diabetes and other contributors to heart disease. The Task Force found little evidence, however, about the long-term effect of these programs on reducing illness and death from heart disease.

The Task Force also found that the harms of screening for obesity and offering weight loss programs are small.

The Task Force Recommendation on Screening for and Managing Obesity: What Does It Mean?

Here is the recommendation. The recommendation has a letter grade. The grade is based on the quality and strength of the evidence about the potential benefits and harms of the screening and referral. This and other Task Force evidence grades are explained in the box at the end of this fact sheet.

When the Task Force recommends screening (Grades A or B), it is because the screening has more potential benefits than potential harms. The Notes next to the recommendation help to explain key ideas.

Visit the Task Force Web site to read the full [recommendation statement](#) on screening for and managing obesity. The statement explains the evidence that the Task Force reviewed and how it decided on the grade. An [evidence report](#) on this topic provides more detail about the studies the Task Force considered.

1 The Task Force recommends *screening* all adults for obesity. Clinicians should offer or refer patients with a body mass index of $\geq 30 \text{ kg/m}^2$ to *intensive, multicomponent behavioral interventions*. **Grade B**

Notes

1 screening
Measuring height and weight and calculating BMI. Measuring the size of the waist also may be useful in some patients.

$\geq 30 \text{ kg/m}^2$
A BMI of 30 or greater.

intensive, multicomponent behavioral...

Weight loss programs that have 12 to 26 sessions in a year and that include a variety of activities and strategies to help people lose weight.

What is the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force?

The Task Force is an independent group of national experts in prevention and evidence-based medicine. The Task Force works to improve the health of all Americans by making evidence-based recommendations about clinical preventive services such as screenings, counseling services, or preventive medicines. The recommendations apply to people with no signs or symptoms of the disease being discussed.

To develop a recommendation statement, Task Force members consider the best available science and research on a topic. For each topic, the Task Force posts draft documents for public comment, including a draft recommendation statement. All comments are reviewed and considered in developing the **final recommendation statement**. To learn more, visit the [Task Force Web site](#).

USPSTF Recommendation Grades

Grade	Definition
A	Recommended.
B	Recommended.
C	Recommendation depends on the patient's situation.
D	Not recommended.
I statement	There is not enough evidence to make a recommendation.

Click Here to Learn More About Obesity and Ways to Achieve a Healthy Weight

-  **Watch Your Weight**
(healthfinder.gov)
-  **Body Mass Index**
(Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)
-  **What Are Overweight and Obesity?**
(National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute)
-  **Aim for a Healthy Weight**
(National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute)