



UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA
HEART INSTITUTE
INSTITUT DE CARDIOLOGIE
DE L'UNIVERSITÉ D'OTTAWA

MYTHS ABOUT OBESITY

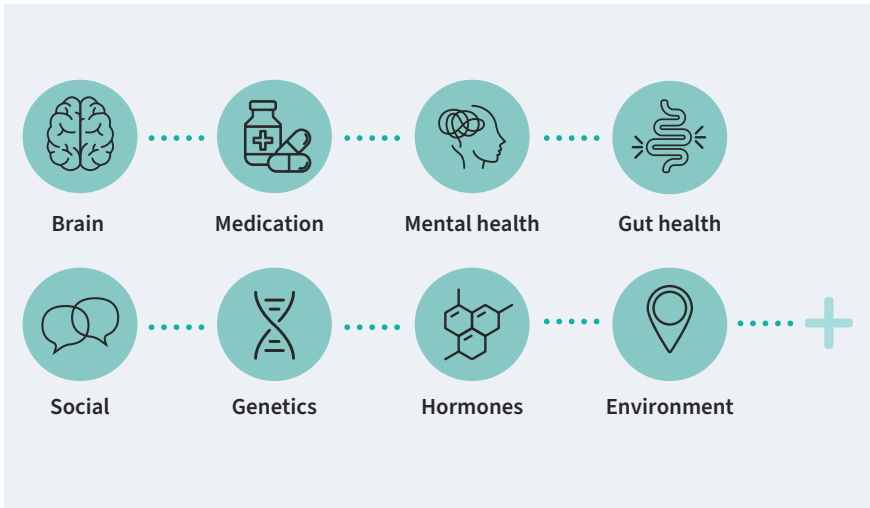
WHY IT'S NOT ABOUT WEIGHT



It's time to stop shaming and blaming people for their weight

Know the facts about weight

- Our genetics determine up to 40-70%¹ of our weight and body size.
- Gaining weight or not keeping off lost weight is controlled by our brain.
- Obesity is a chronic disease, just like diabetes, hypertension, and cancer.
- There are evidence-based treatments available.
- More than 300 factors contribute to weight gain. Many of these are beyond an individual's control.

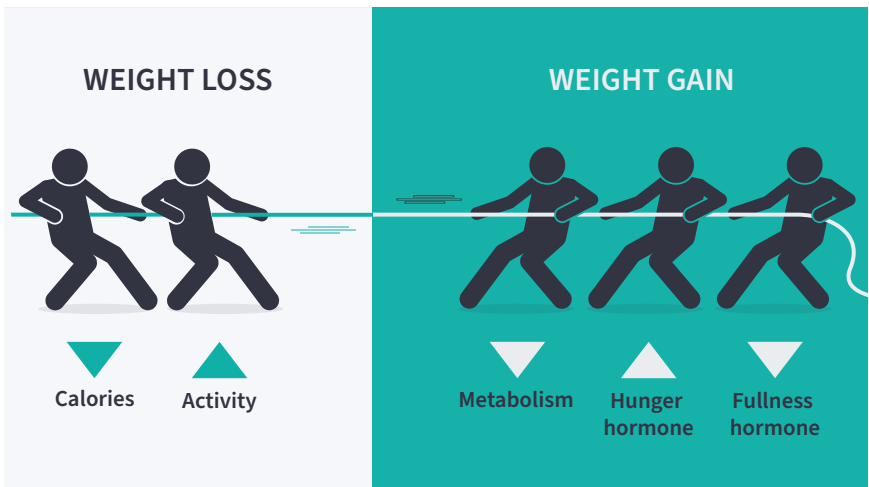


- Body fat, called adipose tissue, is a key organ that sends information to and receives information from the brain. It helps to keep us alive by connecting with dozens of hormones that control body weight, hunger, fullness, cravings, etc.

1 health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/why-people-become-overweight

- Our bodies evolved to be hardwired to defend against weight loss. When we lose weight from diet and exercise, our brain defends weight loss by:
 - Slowing down metabolism
 - Increasing hunger
 - Decreasing fullness
- This means it can be hard to lose weight or keep weight off on your own.

The tug-of-war of weight management



Reminder

Healthy behaviours should be done because you enjoy them and want to be healthier, **not** because of the number on the scale!

What is obesity?

- Obesity is a chronic disease defined as excess or abnormal body fat that impairs health.²
- Not everyone with a larger body size, higher weight, or higher body mass index (BMI) has obesity.
- Obesity is not simple, and how someone develops obesity is complex.
- Many root causes could exist and look different from one person to another.



Medical health causes



Mental health causes



Functional health causes



Social health causes

- BMI is a measure of body size, not health. BMI does not tell us the root causes that can impact our health.
- The location and type of body fat is more important than the amount we carry.
- Healthcare providers trained in obesity care can assess, diagnose and treat obesity.
- Weight loss does not always equate to being healthier.
- Obesity is like high blood pressure and heart disease – they all need long-term management and treatment. There are no quick-fix solutions.

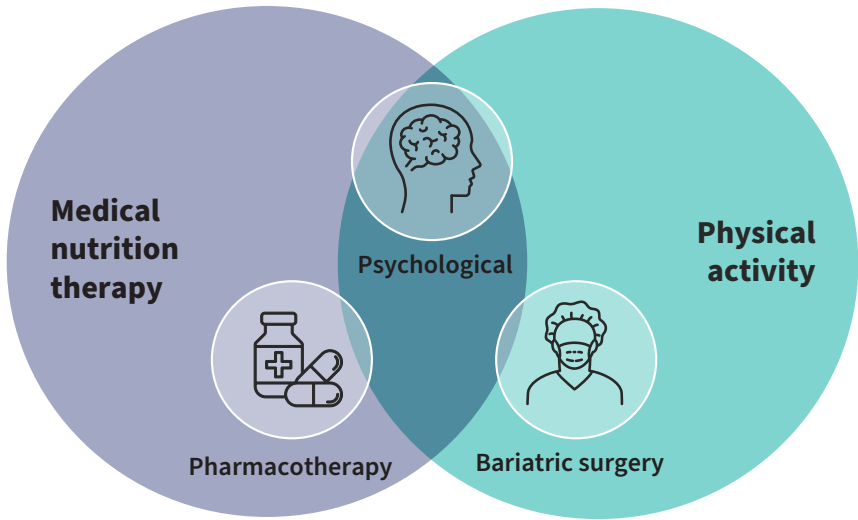
“Once I learned obesity was a chronic disease, I realized I did not have to manage it by myself. I was able to focus on the root causes and get treatment and support for them.”

- *Anonymous patient*

2 CPG - Wharton, S., Lau, D, Vallis, M., Sharma, MM., et al. Obesity in adults: a clinical practice guideline. CMAJ. 2020;192(31):E875-E891. DOI:10.1503/cmaj.191707

What treatments are available?

- There are three types of treatments that need to be personalized and can be used alone or in combination with each other: psychological, medication and surgery.



- Medical nutrition therapy and physical activity interventions can be personalized to your treatment plan, values, preferences and goals.
- Eating less and moving more is not a cure. As for any chronic disease, healthy behaviours around nutrition and physical activity are important for everyone.
- Treatment should focus on improving health outcomes, quality of life and self-care, rather than weight loss alone.



Evidence-based treatments are available for obesity. These treatments can help maintain healthy behaviours, like eating habits and physical activity.

Talk to your doctor for more information.

Let's talk about weight bias and stigma

- Reportedly, 64% of adults with higher body weight experience weight bias from healthcare providers.³
- Weight bias or stigma can prevent people from getting medical support and may cause people to avoid seeking health care.
- Weight bias can increase stress hormones involved in controlling body weight.

Test your assumptions

	YES	NO
Do you assume a person's health, traits, behaviours and/or abilities are based on their body size, weight, or shape?		
Do you think that everyone with a larger body size or a higher body mass index has obesity and needs to lose weight?		
Do you believe people with obesity are personally responsible for their condition?		
Do you let negative comments about someone who has a larger body size or obesity go unchallenged?		
Do you avoid being around people you think have obesity?		

Source: Ramos Salas, Ximena and Forhan, Mary. *Checking your attitude.* Apple Magazine. Winter 2018, 2018, 28.

Did you answer **Yes** to any of these questions?

You may have a bias against people with larger bodies or those who have obesity.

3 obesitycanada.ca/resources/report-weight-bias/

Know the facts about weight bias

- Reportedly, 54% of adults with higher body weight have been stigmatized by their coworkers.⁴
- People with larger bodies are often shown in the media as being lazy and eating junk food, often with close-ups of their belly or their bottom, which may contribute to weight stigma.
- Even thinking about weight bias can lead to negative feelings. This can affect people's thoughts and feelings about food, physical activity, body image and self-esteem.

"I saw a new doctor who suggested I lose weight because I looked a bit chubby. He had no idea I had spent a good part of my teen years in treatment for an eating disorder."

- *Anonymous patient*

What weight stigma and discrimination look like

- Being teased, insulted, made fun of, excluded by friends, family, and peers
- Physical assault or harassment
- Undersized chairs in public locations
- Hospital equipment that does not fit (for example, blood pressure cuffs, gowns, beds, etc.)
- Potentially denied access to medical treatments
- Being overlooked for job advancement or for employment
- Not having diverse sizes of clothing from which to choose
- Assuming one's weight is the reason for any of their health concerns



Weight bias and stigma

Refers to negative attitudes toward others because of their weight. Weight bias and discrimination is a widespread problem.

4 obesitycanada.ca/resources/report-weight-bias/

Have you or someone you know experienced weight bias?

Here's what to do:

- Consider contacting the patient advocacy office at your hospital or healthcare centre.
- Talk with a friend or family member about your experience.
- Join a support group to talk with others who have experienced weight stigma. Try www.oc-connect.ca.
- Reach out to a psychologist or social worker for strategies if you feel upset, down or depressed.
- Express to your provider how their comments or actions make you feel.
- Report weight bias or discrimination to Obesity Canada. Visit obesitycanada.ca/resources/report-weight-bias.

Strategies to reduce weight bias and stigma

- Use respectful language. Be mindful of the words you use to describe someone's weight (including your own).
- Fat jokes are not funny. Speak up if you see someone engaging in weight-based stigma, teasing or bullying.
- Let friends, family or peers know their words and actions are hurtful.
- Support others to understand that obesity is a complex, chronic disease, and not a character flaw.
- Share positive qualities about yourself and others that do not relate to weight, size, shape, or appearance.
- Avoid making comments about what someone eats or their physical activity habits.
- Weight loss may or may not improve someone's health. Focus on non-scale victories instead of the number on the scale.

How the University of Ottawa Heart Institute is helping to reduce weight bias

- We believe everyone, regardless of size or weight, deserves the same quality level of care.
- We are changing the conversation about weight and health.
- We want people to know that weight and body size are not measures of health.
- We are here to listen and provide resources.
- We are shifting the focus to health behaviours and away from weight loss.
- We are training staff to be aware of their own weight biases.

If you are concerned that your weight is affecting your health, list some reasons why you are concerned. Bring this pamphlet and talk to your doctor about assessment and treatment options.

Resources

University of Ottawa Heart Institute

- Visit ottawaheart.ca/obesity-education to learn more about obesity guidelines at the Heart Institute.

Obesity Canada



obesitycanada.ca



Join **OC Connect** for free. This is a supportive community for anyone affected by obesity to meet and discuss their experience, ask questions and more. Visit www.oc-connect.ca.



Obesity Digital is an online forum for healthcare professionals to connect with peers, share information and access tools for evidence-based practice. Visit obesity.timedright.com.



Clinical practice guidelines are available. Visit obesitycanada.ca/guidelines.



Professional education: Visit cpd.obesitycanada.ca.



Talk to your healthcare provider for evidence-based programs and clinics in your area or visit finder.obesitycanada.ca.

Resources

The University of Ottawa Heart Institute does not offer obesity management nor endorse the services listed.

The centres* below are using evidenced-based obesity practices.

The Ottawa Hospital Bariatric Centre of Excellence

(Adult Weight Management Clinic)

**Publicly funded medical and surgical programs available by referral through ontariobariatricnetwork.ca.

Bariatric Medical Institute**

(Family and adult programs available)

bmimedical.ca

LEAF Weight Management Clinic**

leafwmc.com

* As of 2023. Refer to finder.obesitycanada.ca for a provider or clinic near you.

**Fee-for-service and publicly funded services available.

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