



MIDDLESEX COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENT

TIP SHEET

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Obesity and Chronic Disease

Overweight and obesity continue to be a problem throughout the United States. According to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2005-2006 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) the prevalence of obesity in adult men was at 33.3%. Among adult women, the prevalence of obesity was 35.3%. Based on the 2003-2004 NHANES results, an estimated 17% of children and adolescents ages 2-19 years are overweight. Although there has not been a large statistical change in the last few years, these numbers represent a dramatic increase over the past twenty years.

Obesity raises concerns because it increases the risk of diseases and health conditions such as high blood pressure, high total cholesterol, high levels of triglycerides, type 2 diabetes, coronary heart disease, stroke, sleep apnea, gallbladder disease, and some cancers. Given the extent of the concern with obesity, it is important to know what can be done to reduce its prevalence.

Overweight and Obesity

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention *overweight and obesity are both labels for ranges of weight that are greater than what is generally considered healthy for a given height. The terms also identify ranges of weight that have been shown to increase the likelihood of certain diseases and other health problems.*

For adults, overweight and obesity ranges are determined by using weight and height to calculate a number called the "body mass index" (BMI).

- *An adult who has a BMI between 25 and 29.9 is considered overweight.*
- *An adult who has a BMI of 30 or higher is considered obese."*

There are other measurements of the impact of weight on an individual's health such as waist circumference and waist to hip ratio (For more information review the tip sheet, "Know Your Numbers").

Factors that contribute to overweight and obesity

Behavior, environment and genetic factors may all play a role in causing people to become overweight or obese. Behavior that influences obesity, such as turning down healthy food options

for less healthy counterparts, is often touted as the only reason that a person is overweight. People who regularly consume more calories than they burn will gain weight. People, who have restraints on physical activity due to environment or have less access to healthy food options, may gain weight as a consequence of the environmental conditions that affect their lives. And finally, genetics may play a role in how a person's body metabolizes food or their capacity for physical activity.

Chronic Diseases and Health Risks Linked to Obesity

When people are overweight or obese, they are more likely to develop the following health problems:

- Hypertension (high blood pressure)
- Dyslipidemia (for example, high total cholesterol or high levels of triglycerides)
- Type 2 diabetes
- Coronary heart disease
- Stroke
- Gallbladder disease
- Osteoarthritis
- Sleep apnea and respiratory problems
- Some cancers (endometrial, breast, and colon)

Recommendations

The more overweight a person is, the more likely that person is to have health problems. Among people who are overweight and obese, weight loss can help reduce the chances of developing these health problems. Studies show that if a person is overweight or obese, reducing body weight by 5 percent to 10 percent can improve one's health ([CDC.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)). Before embarking on a major weight loss plan, consult with your regular physician. The key to maintaining a healthy weight is to stay within the recommended daily allowance of calories for your height, weight and physical activity level. Moderate physical activity most days of the week coupled with a nutritious diet will help to reduce the risk of obesity and many chronic diseases linked to it.

For more information on key recommendations visit

http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/topics/obesity/calltoaction/fact_whatcanyoudo.htm

For more information on BMI visit

<http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/healthyweight/assessing/bmi/index.htm>

For more information on obesity visit

<http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/>