



# Managing a healthy weight

Nearly two-thirds of Australian adults are overweight or obese, with the prevalence of overweight and obesity steadily increasing<sup>i</sup>. There are many ways you can manage your weight, so it's important to understand the common causes of weight gain.

## What does it mean to be overweight or obese?

Overweight and obese are terms used to describe someone who is carrying a high level of body fat that presents health risks<sup>1</sup>.

## What causes overweight and obesity?

In most people, being overweight or obese is caused by a sustained energy imbalance; that is, when energy obtained from eating and drinking is greater than the energy being used for physical activity<sup>ii</sup>. This energy imbalance may be influenced by lifestyle factors, and by a person's biological and genetic characteristics<sup>1</sup>.

## Why is being overweight or obese problematic?

Carrying excess body fat puts you at an increased risk of developing health problems. Generally speaking, the more body fat you're carrying, the higher your risk of developing a chronic condition, such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, high cholesterol or musculoskeletal problems like back pain<sup>iii</sup>.

## Assessing a healthy weight

These goals are a general guide and can vary from person to person. Work with your doctor to set your personal healthy weight goals including appropriate BMI and waist circumference.

### How to measure BMI

$$\text{Weight (kg)} \div \text{Height (m)}^2 = \text{BMI}$$

For example, a 75kg person with a height of 1.75m:

$$75 \div (1.75 \times 1.75) = 24.5 \text{ BMI}$$

### Risk Classification<sup>iv</sup>

BMI	Classification	Risk
Less than 18.50	Underweight	Low*
18.50–24.99	Normal range	Average
25.00–29.99	Overweight/Preobese	Increased
30.00–34.99	Obese Class 1	Moderate
35.00–39.99	Obese Class 2	Severe
40.0 or greater	Obese Class 3	Very severe

\* Risk of other clinical problems increased

## Some risk factors you can't change

### Family history

Research has found that some genetic traits, such as taking longer to burn up kilojoules (having a slow metabolism) or having a large appetite, can make losing weight more difficult<sup>v</sup>. However, these genes do not make it impossible, and many cases where obesity runs in families may be due to poor eating habits, rather than genetics.

### Other medical risk factors

Certain medical conditions or medications such as some steroids and anti-depressants can cause weight gain. If you are concerned, speak to your treating doctor.

## Some risk factors you can change

### Physical inactivity

Being physically active can reduce your risk of becoming overweight or obese. Australia's physical activity and sedentary behaviour guidelines<sup>v</sup> recommend adults achieve a weekly total of 2½ to 5 hours of moderate-intensity exercise, along with strength-training (resistance) activities twice a week.

### Unhealthy eating habits

Having a diet that is consistently high in saturated or trans fats and high in sodium (salt) can increase your risk becoming overweight or obese. Enjoy a variety of vegetables, fruit, and whole grains every day to fuel your body, whilst helping your weight.

## Drinking too much alcohol

Drinking large amounts of alcohol directly contributes to weight gain<sup>vi</sup>. This can occur in four ways:

1. It stops your body from burning fat.
2. It is high in kilojoules (energy dense and nutrient poor).
3. It can make you feel hungry.
4. It can lead to poor food choices.

Australian guidelines<sup>vii</sup> recommend no more than two standard alcoholic drinks per day.

### What is a standard drink?

#### 1 standard drink is equal to:



1 pot or midday (285mL)  
of full strength beer



1 stubby or can (375mL)  
of mid strength beer



1 schooner (425mL)  
of light beer



100mL  
of wine



1 nip (30mL)  
of spirits

## References

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