

# Obesity and Women

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[Kathy Maddox] Welcome to this CDC women's health podcast about obesity. I'm your host, Kathy Maddox. Obesity continues to be an epidemic in the United States. Since 1980, obesity rates have doubled in adults over age 20 and tripled in children ages 12 to 19. Kelly Pattillo, with CDC's Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity and Obesity, is joining me today to talk about obesity and women. Welcome, Kelly.

[Kelly Pattillo] Thanks, Kathy.

[Kathy Maddox] Kelly, what exactly is obesity?

[Kelly Pattillo] Obesity is a label for a range of weight that's greater than what's generally considered healthy for a given height. For adults, obesity ranges are determined by using weight and height to calculate a number called the *body mass index*, or BMI. An adult who has a BMI of 30 or higher is considered obese.

[Kathy Maddox] How many women are obese in the United States?

[Kelly Pattillo] In the U.S., more than one in three women and about one in six girls are obese. Certain racial or ethnic groups are more affected by obesity than others. For example, a higher percentage of African American and Mexican American girls 12 to 19 years old are obese compared with white girls in the same age group.

[Kathy Maddox] What problems affect women who are obese?

[Kelly Pattillo] Obesity can have a number of consequences, including coronary heart disease, type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, stroke, sleep apnea, and some cancers, including endometrial cancer, breast cancer, and colon cancer. It can also lead to gynecological problems, such as abnormal periods and infertility. Women can lower the likelihood of developing these conditions if they maintain a healthy weight.

[Kathy Maddox] What can we do to help keep our weight in the healthy range?

[Kelly Pattillo] Maintaining a healthy weight is mostly about what and how much you eat and drink and how much physical activity you get. To lose weight, you need to burn more calories than you eat and drink.

[Kathy Maddox] Give us some tips on how we can improve what we eat and drink.

[Kelly Pattillo] Begin by eating a variety of fruits and vegetables, and drink lots of plain water rather than sugar-sweetened beverages. You can still consume foods and drinks you enjoy, but try to limit those that are high in sugar and fat. If you are trying to lower the number of calories

you consume in order to lose weight, you don't have to go around feeling hungry. Eat foods that don't have a lot of calories but can help you feel full, like salads, citrus fruits, and broth-based soups. Eating more proteins, such as low-fat or fat-free dairy products, lean meats, fish, and beans, can also help you feel satisfied.

[Kathy Maddox] What about physical activity? How can we improve that?

[Kelly Pattillo] Adults should try to be active for at least two and a half hours a week, doing activities that raise their breathing and heart rate. They should also do activities that strengthen their muscles at least two days a week. If you want to lose weight, you may need to do more activity and consume less calories. Encourage kids and teens to be active for at least one hour a day. Biking, swimming, jogging, dancing, playing actively, and brisk walking – either alone or with others – are all great ways for kids and adults to stay active.

[Kathy Maddox] Thank you, Kelly, for explaining the importance of diet and physical activity in preventing and controlling obesity and its health consequences in women. For more information on healthy weight, including BMI calculators, please visit [www.cdc.gov/healthyweight](http://www.cdc.gov/healthyweight). For more information on women's health, visit [www.cdc.gov/women](http://www.cdc.gov/women). For CDC, I'm Kathy Maddox.

*[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) or call 1-800-CDC-INFO, 24/7.*