

Obesity Update – Dr. Charles P. Catania, MD

Obesity is a complex and increasingly common disease that is associated with many health risks such as high blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease, certain cancers, and even death. Maintaining a normal weight is one of the best ways to prevent many serious health problems.

BMI is a calculation of an adult's weight in kilograms divided by height in meters squared. For most adults, an ideal BMI is in the 18.5 to 24.9 range. For children and young people aged 2 to 18, the BMI calculation considers age and gender as well as height and weight.

If your BMI is:

- below 18.5 – you're in the underweight range
- between 18.5 and 24.9 – you're in the healthy weight range
- between 25 and 29.9 – you're in the overweight range
- 30 or over – you're in the obese range

BMI by itself isn't a perfect tool for diagnosing obesity. For example, people who are very muscular could have a BMI that indicates obesity – even if body fat is normal or low. On the other hand, BMI may suggest that obesity is absent when body fat is actually high. This happens most commonly in older adults.

The measurement around your waist (sometimes called a waist circumference) is also commonly used to diagnose obesity. Although waist measurement is also not a perfect tool for diagnosing obesity, having a lot of body fat around your waist is tied to several health issues. You can measure your waist by wrapping a measuring tape around your waist (closest to your belly button). For most women, a waist measurement of 35 inches or more could put you at higher risk. For most men, that number is 40 inches.

Obesity risk is complicated by factors such as genetics, hormones, lifestyle, and environment. Certainly, eating more calories than your body can use can cause your body to store extra fat, which can increase your risk of obesity.

Some individual and environmental factors that increase your risk of obesity include:

- Poor sleeping habits
- Quitting smoking
- Stress
- Availability of fresh, healthy food
- Availability of safe exercise options
- Safe home life
- Access to medical care

There are different treatments for obesity such as:

- Lifestyle treatments range from self-help and commercial weight loss programs to professional dietary counseling, physical activity training, and behavior therapy.

- Surgical treatment may be an option for people with severe obesity. Surgery for obesity (called metabolic and bariatric surgery) can help patients lose a large amount of weight and can reverse some complications of obesity. Although some weight regain is common after surgery, the effect of this treatment option is often permanent (examples: Gastric Bypass and Gastric Sleeve).

There are six weight-loss drugs have been approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for long-term use:

- Bupropion-naltrexone (Contrave)
- Liraglutide (Saxenda)
- Orlistat (Xenical, Alli)
- Phentermine-topiramate (Qsymia)
- Semaglutide (Wegovy)
- Setmelanotide (Imcivree)
- Tirzepatide (Zepbound)

Most prescription weight-loss drugs work by making you feel less hungry or fuller. Some do both. The exception is orlistat. It affects the way your body absorbs fat.

Bupropion-naltrexone

Bupropion-naltrexone is a combination drug. Naltrexone is used to treat alcohol and opioid addiction. Bupropion is a drug to treat depression, called an antidepressant, and a drug to help people stop smoking. Common side effects include nausea, headache, and constipation.

Liraglutide

Liraglutide also is used to manage diabetes but is approved for obesity. It's given as a daily shot. Nausea is a common complaint. Vomiting may limit its use.

Orlistat

You also can get orlistat in a reduced-strength form without a prescription (Alli). Orlistat can cause side effects such as passing gas and having loose stools. You need to follow a low-fat diet when taking this medicine. In rare cases, people have had serious liver injury with orlistat.

Phentermine-topiramate

Phentermine-topiramate is a combination of a weight-loss drug called phentermine and an anticonvulsant called topiramate. Phentermine has the potential to be misused because it acts like a stimulant drug called an amphetamine. Other possible side effects include an increase in heart rate and blood pressure, insomnia, constipation, and nervousness. Topiramate increases the risk of birth defects.

Phentermine by itself (Adipex-P, Lomaira) also is used for weight loss. It's one of four similar weight-loss drugs approved for use for less than 12 weeks, called short-term use obesity medications. The other drugs in this group aren't often prescribed. These meds are not highly used or recommended due to low efficacy and high addictive value.

Semaglutide (Wegovy)

Semaglutide also is used to help control type 2 diabetes. You take it as a weekly shot to manage obesity. It can cause side effects such as nausea and vomiting, diarrhea, belly pain, headache, and tiredness.

Setmelanotide

The FDA has approved setmelanotide only for people aged 6 and older who have obesity due to one of these rare inherited conditions: Pro-opiomelanocortin deficiency, Proprotein subtilisin-kexin type 1 deficiency, Leptin receptor deficiency.

To take the drug, you'll need to have test results that show you have one of these conditions. Setmelanotide doesn't treat any of the gene problems that cause these conditions. But it can help you lose weight. It can lessen your appetite and make you feel fuller. And it may help you burn calories while your body is at rest.

The bottom line:

Weight-loss drugs aren't an easy answer to weight loss. But they may help you make the lifestyle changes that you need to practice losing weight and improve your health.

Dr. Charles P. Catania, is the Chief Medical Officer for PentaHealth, he is Board Certified in Family Medicine and Hospice Medicine. He received his medical degree from the American University of the Caribbean School of Medicine; medically trained in England; and completed residency at Underwood Memorial Hospital in Woodbury, New Jersey, where he was named Chief Resident in 2009 and served on the New Jersey Academy of Family Physicians Board of Directors.

Dr. Catania has been in a private practice setting since 2010 and has been named "Readers' Choice Top Doc" in South Jersey Magazine in August 2013, and "Top Doc" by his peers in Mainline Today Magazine in 2016, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, and 2022.

Dr. Catania has an interest in all facets of family medicine. He enjoys spending time and getting to know his patients on a personal level and providing care when they need it most. He loves working our walk-in hours and in our PentaHealth Today clinic on Sundays.

He treasures time with his wife and children, and he takes pride in bringing a very personal and friendly experience when caring for his patients here at PentaHealth.



Dr. Charles P. Catania

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