VA/DOD CLINICAL PRACTICE GUIDELINE FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF ADULT OVERWEIGHT AND OBESITY

Department of Veterans Affairs
Department of Defense

Patient Summary

QUALIFYING STATEMENTS

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Department of Defense (DOD) guidelines use the best and most recent information that is available at the time they are published. Guidelines provide information that providers, health care team members, and patients can use to provide better care for individuals with overweight and obesity. They do not define a standard of care and should not be used in this way. They are also not the only option for the management of overweight and obesity.

This Clinical Practice Guideline is based on a complete and organized review of both clinical studies and studies about how diseases affect the health and illness of groups of people. A panel of experts from a number of clinical fields developed this guideline. The Guideline clearly explains how different care options relate to health outcomes. To do this, the experts rated both the quality of the clinical studies and the strength of the recommendations.

It is normal for providers to vary in how they plan to care for patients with overweight and obesity because they consider the needs of each patient, the available resources, and the limits that are unique to their healthcare setting or type of practice. Health care professionals should assess how well these Guidelines apply to each patient and their clinical setting or situation. Patients can use the information in this Guideline to understand the different ways that overweight and obesity can be treated. This will help you discuss management options with your provider and team. Working together, you can create a personalized treatment plan that meets your needs.

These guidelines are not intended to represent VA or TRICARE policy. The Guideline recommendations for specific tests and/or treatments do not guarantee coverage of the patient's care by civilian providers or health care facilities. You can find more information on current TRICARE benefits at or by contacting your regional TRICARE Managed Care Support Contractor.

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I. What is Overweight? What is Obesity?

Overweight: a chronic medical condition where the body stores excess fat.

- This stage comes before obesity, when extra fat hasn't caused significant health problems yet.
- Early detection and treatment may help prevent progression from overweight to obesity and more severe health issues.

Obesity: a complex, chronic medical condition where the body stores too much fat, causing health issues.

- This happens because the systems that control hunger, fullness, and weight do not work the way they should.
- Factors such as genetics, medicines, mental health, sleep, disability, nutrition, social circumstances, and physical activity all play a role.
- Excess fat can harm the body in various ways, affecting metabolism (like blood glucose {sugar} and cholesterol), straining bones and joints, and affecting emotional health and how people are treated by others.
- Not everyone with excess fat experiences the same health issues since genetics and biology play such a significant role in this.

Body Mass Index (BMI): **a simple screening tool often used by health care providers.** It's difficult to measure an exact amount of body fat in everyday medical practice. Because of this, BMI is used.

- BMI is calculated using a person's height and weight. It helps identify categories such as underweight, healthy weight, overweight, and obesity.
- While helpful for looking at health trends in large groups, BMI is not always the best measure for an individual.
- BMI does not tell exactly how much body fat a person has or if they have a specific health condition. It can be a useful starting point for understanding health risks.

Waist Circumference (WC): measurement around the abdomen.

- Extra fat around the waist is linked with higher health risks compared to fat in other body areas.
- Used in addition to BMI to assess health.

Our understanding of how to measure and define overweight, obesity, and extra body fat and their health impacts is still changing as science learns more. For now, we use BMI and waist circumference to talk about overweight and obesity, but these definitions may change over time. When "weight loss" and "weight management" are mentioned, know that the goal is to lower extra body fat to improve health, daily function, and overall well-being.

Table 1. Overweight and Obesity Classification by BMI, Waist Measurement (WM), and Associated Disease Risk

Classification	BMI for non-Asian populations (kg/m2)	BMI for Asian populations (kg/m2)	WM (inches)	Disease risk* with normal WM	Disease risk* with excessive WM
Underweight	Less than (<) 18.5	Less than 18.5	--	--	--
Healthy Weight	18.5 – 24.9	18.5–22.9	< 40 for men < 35.4 for Asian men < 35 for women < 31.5 for Asian women	--	--
Overweight	25.0 – 29.9	23.0–24.9	--	increased	moderate
Obesity Class 1	30.0 – 34.9	25.0–29.9	≥ 40 for men ≥ 35.4 for Asian men ≥ 35 for women ≥ 31.5 for Asian women	moderate	severe
Obesity Class 2	35.0 – 39.0	30.0-34.99	--	severe	very severe
Obesity Class 3	Greater than or equal to (≥) 40.0	35.0 and above	--	very severe	very severe

*disease risk for obesity-associated conditions (examples in paragraph below).
Abbreviations: BMI: body mass index; kg: kilograms; m: meters; WM: waist measurement

The classification table is based on the link between BMI, waist measurement, and overall disease risk. The relationship between BMI and disease risk varies for individuals and populations. Individuals whose BMI falls into one of the Obesity and Overweight categories would likely benefit from reducing excess fat to lower their risk for heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, liver disease, and even premature death.

II. Why is it Important to know about Overweight and Obesity?

Having overweight or obesity may increase your risk of serious health problems.

Overweight or obesity increases the risk of developing conditions like:

- Heart disease
- Stroke

- High blood pressure (hypertension)
- Pre-diabetes and diabetes
- Certain types of cancer (such as colorectal [colon], breast cancer in postmenopausal women, and prostate cancer)
- High cholesterol
- Obstructive sleep apnea (airway blockage that affects breathing while asleep)
- Osteoarthritis (wear and tear of joints, especially hips and knees)
- Metabolic dysfunction-associated steatotic liver disease (formerly non-alcoholic fatty liver disease; fat build-up in the liver causing inflammation, scarring (cirrhosis), and sometimes liver failure or cancer)

Body weight and health are affected by many factors, including:

- Eating patterns: what, how much, and how often you eat and drink.
- Physical activity: how much you move your body.
- Sleep: the quality of your sleep and how long you sleep can affect your food, beverage, and activity choices. It can also affect hunger and fullness hormones.
- Genetics: genes can affect hunger, fullness, and weight. Studies show that up to 70% of a person's risk for having overweight or obesity can be inherited.
- Medicines: some medicines can cause weight gain or loss.
- Environment: where you live, learn, work, and play affects what and how much you eat and drink, and how active you are.
- Society: culture, education, and peer or media pressure can affect what and how much you eat and drink, and how active you are.

III. How Common are Overweight and Obesity?

- 40% of adults age 20 or older in the U.S. have obesity, and an additional 32% have overweight.[1]
- The U.S. has one of the highest obesity rates among developed nations.[2]
- Obesity is especially common among non-Hispanic Blacks and Hispanics.[1]
- 21.6% of U.S. Service Members have obesity.[3]
- 41% of Veterans receiving care in the Veterans Health Administration have obesity.[4]

IV. Strategies and Goals for Weight Management

For many people, the first goal for weight management treatment may be to lose 5-10% of their current weight. This amount of weight loss can lead to important health benefits. These benefits include:

- improved blood pressure
- improved cholesterol levels
- reduced risk of diabetes and other chronic conditions

- better quality of life

Keeping a weight that is healthy for you can help you feel good and enjoy the things you want to do.

Weight management strategies:

- Set a goal for a small behavior change you can maintain long-term (e.g., "I will switch one sugary beverage for water every day").
- Use SMART goals to plan small changes that will help you reach your weight loss goal. A SMART goal is one that is:
  - **S**pecific – What will you do?
  - **M**easurable – How will you know you are making progress?
  - **A**ction-oriented – What actions will you take to reach the goal?
  - **R**ealistic- Is the goal doable for you? and
  - **T**ime-based – When will you start? When will you review your goal to see if it makes sense to keep working on it?
- Engage in lifestyle and physical activities you enjoy or have enjoyed in the past.
- Make healthy changes to your eating patterns (e.g., eat more vegetables).
- Talk to your health care providers and pharmacist to understand factors that may have contributed to weight gain or make it hard for you to lose weight. Prescribed medications can affect weight. Some can cause weight gain and others promote weight loss. Talk to your prescribing providers about your medications to see if they may be affecting your weight.
- Think about what may get in the way of your health and weight management goals. Share your goals with friends and family and ask for their support (e.g., go for a short walk with coworkers during your work break).

V. Weight Management Options

Weight management is a lifelong process that includes regular long-term follow-up with your health care team. The Department of Defense and Veterans Health Administration offer treatments and resources to support your weight management goals.

Weight loss happens when you take in less energy (calories) than your body needs to maintain your current weight. There are various dietary approaches that can support weight loss. Work with your health care team to find the best approach for you. This will help you choose a plan that can most easily become a lifelong habit. There are also many physical activities to choose from. Finding activities you enjoy will make it easier to stick with them. Remember, short bursts of physical activity regularly can be just as helpful as longer sessions if you have limited time. Every minute counts!

A. Comprehensive Lifestyle Intervention (CLI)

Comprehensive lifestyle intervention programs combine changes in habits,

behaviors, food and drink intake, and physical activity, with support from a health care team member.

- CLI is a key part of any weight management plan.
- It can be provided individually or in groups, in-person, by phone, or through video.
- You and your provider may also discuss other lifestyle changes, like getting more sleep, and the importance of losing weight and keeping it off.

B. Weight Management Medications

Some people may benefit from taking a medication specifically for weight management along with participating in a comprehensive lifestyle intervention to help reach a healthier weight. You and your health care provider may consider using a medication that has been approved for weight loss.

Medications approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for long-term weight management include: semaglutide (Wegovy), tirzepatide (Zepbound), liraglutide (Saxenda), phentermine/topiramate (Qsymia), naltrexone/bupropion (Contrave), orlistat (Xenical, Alli), and Setmelanotide (Imcivree).

Consider these important points when deciding if weight management medication may be right for you:

- Medications for weight management can be prescribed at any time during treatment for weight management but should always be used in combination with a comprehensive lifestyle intervention. Medications can help address underlying biology that may drive weight gain. Participation in a comprehensive lifestyle intervention is crucial to maintain your health as you manage your weight while using medication.
- Choosing medication should be a shared decision between you and your provider. There is no one medication that is right for everyone. Your provider may recommend medication based on how well it works, other conditions you may have, or potential side effects. Close follow-up with your provider is important to monitor your response and side effects.
- If you aren’t losing weight in 3-4 months or if you regain a significant amount of weight you previously lost your provider may talk to you about trying a higher dose of the same medication or a different medication.
- Weight management medications are recommended for long-term use since weight is easily regained when the medication is stopped.
- Using weight management medication long-term does not always lead to greater weight loss. However, continued use may help to maintain weight and avoid weight regain.

C. Metabolic Bariatric (Weight Management) Surgery and Procedures

Weight management surgery may be considered for people with obesity and/or significant obesity-related conditions like diabetes. If you are interested, talk to your health care team to see if you are a candidate and what resources are available. Your health care provider and surgeon may discuss different types of weight loss surgery. The most common are sleeve gastrectomy and Roux-en-Y gastric bypass. Other less common surgeries include the biliopancreatic diversion, one-anastomosis gastric bypass, and single-anastomosis duodenoileostomy or gastroplasty. As with any surgery, there are health risks that come with this type of surgery.

Surgery also requires significant lifelong changes to your lifestyle, and taking extra vitamins and minerals to stay healthy and prevent weight regain. After surgery, you'll have regular visits with your health care team to monitor your health, weight, and nutrition.

VI. Questions to Ask Your Care Team

Ask your provider about anything that is unclear to you. Some questions you might ask:

- How could losing weight improve my health?
- Are any of my medications making it harder to lose weight? Are there others that I could take that would be less likely to have those effects?
- How do I learn more about weight management and treatment options?
- How do I learn more about changing my eating habits?
- What can I do to safely increase my physical activity?
- What are the possible benefits and harms of taking weight management medications?
- Will my medications need to be changed if I lose weight?
- Is weight management surgery an option for me?

VII. Find more information about overweight and obesity:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: https://www.cdc.gov/obesity/
- National Health, Lung, and Blood Institute: https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/overweight-and-obesity
- VA MOVE! Weight Management Program for Veterans: https://www.move.va.gov
- Veterans Health Library: https://www.veteranshealthlibrary.va.gov/HealthyLiving/

VIII. References

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