

THE PATIENT CHANNEL PRESENTS: Obesity: Winning the Battle

Obesity affects a large chunk of the American population. Nearly 65 percent of people in the United States are classified today as obese or overweight and the healthcare costs associated with obesity continue to climb higher. Today they top 100 billion dollars!

I'm Dr. Mark Pochapin, Director of the Jay Monahan Center at Weill Medical College of Cornell University.

Those startling figures may seem like we're losing the battle with obesity. Fortunately, as you'll see, when breakthrough medical treatments are combined with patient education, obesity can be defeated and people can live healthier, more fulfilling lives.

Learn more as you watch Obesity: Winning The Battle.

Narrator

For Kathy O'Connel, fighting back the pounds has been a life long struggle.

Kathy O'Connel, Patient

I was always one of those weight bouncers, I would lose 20 pounds and gain back 30 and a year later lose 40 and gain back 50, so it's always been a chronic problem since I was about 5 or 6 years old.

Narrator

For Kathy, the habit of eating during stressful situations has taken many years to develop and will take time to break... but it can be done.

It is estimated that 2/3 of the American population is now considered overweight and 35%, obese. Obesity now accounts for approximately 300,000 deaths a year in the U.S. alone. It is the number 2 cause of preventable death, only second to smoking.

So, why is obesity in America on the rise? Here are the facts.

Obesity is a complex disease.

Obesity rarely occurs by itself. Usually there are other conditions like high cholesterol, high blood pressure, and diabetes that are complicated by obesity. Also, unhealthy eating patterns started early in life can lead to obesity later on.

We are becoming a more sedentary nation.

William Dietz, PhD.

Center for Disease Control and Prevention

People are less active today than they used to be. There are fewer opportunities for walking, particularly in newer neighborhoods.

In addition, although 25% of all the trips we make are less than 1 mile, 75% of those trips are by car, so we're not as active in our daily life as we once were.

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Narrator

Food intake has changed enormously.

William Dietz, PhD. **Center for Disease Control and Prevention**

Fewer families eat meals together, there's a tremendous variety of foods available. Portion size has increased substantially. Soft drink consumption has increased enormously.

Narrator

Our environment doesn't encourage weight loss.

William Dietz, PhD. **Center for Disease Control and Prevention**

Some urban areas, people don't have access to supermarkets where they can buy fresh fruits and vegetables and healthy foods. So they are reliant on small corner grocery stores or shops in which to get food and those foods are largely junk foods. You can't expect people to eat healthy if the only alternatives that are around them are unhealthy.

Narrator

But when is a person considered clinically obese?

Doctors determine how much a person is overweight by measuring their weight in relation to their height. That ratio is called the body mass index, or BMI. Obesity is defined as having a BMI over 30. For example, a woman who is 5 feet 3 inches tall and weighs 110 pounds has a BMI of 19.5, while a man who is 5 feet 11 inches tall and weighs 220 pounds has a BMI of 31.

To easily calculate your body mass index, locate a B-M-I chart through your doctor or healthcare provider. All you need to know is your height and weight, and the chart will provide your BMI for you.

The higher a patient's BMI, the more likely that patient will suffer from health risks associated with obesity, with type two diabetes at the top of the list.

Daisy Mery, MD **Weight Loss Specialist**

A person who is obese is in the hospital longer, is more sick, stays away from the job more often, they have more accidents, they fracture more easily, there is no question they are not healthy.

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Narrator

Kathy was no exception.

Kathy O'Connel, Patient

I was starting to have problems with my ankles and my knees and just feeling like mobility was a real problem.

Narrator

But for others, the medical complications can be even more severe.

William Dietz, PhD. **Center for Disease Control and Prevention**

Today the diseases that cause so much illness and death are chronic diseases, diseases like cardiovascular disease, or cancer or diabetes. And obesity is a major contributor to all of these diseases.

Narrator

Health risks associated with obesity can include type two diabetes, as a result of insulin resistance, high blood pressure which can contribute to congestive heart failure, kidney disease and stroke, sleep apnea caused by fat deposits in the tongue and neck, and infertility.

Daisy Mery, MD **Weight Loss Specialist**

Your cholesterol which was 283 when you first came to us went down to 246!

Narrator

The fact remains, people who are obese and then lose the weight, are simply healthier.

Daisy Mery, MD **Weight Loss Specialist**

We do recognize that a lot of the diseases can be improved significantly, and some of them eliminated, like you saw in diabetic patients, just by weight reduction.

Narrator

And even a small amount of weight loss can make a huge difference.

William Dietz, PhD.
Center for Disease Control and Prevention

I think people get discouraged when they think about weight loss because they think they need to lose 50 pounds or 100 pounds, when in fact modest weight loss, 5-10 percent of body weight will reverse many of the obesity related co-morbidities.

Narrator

Learning the physical and medical complications that accompany obesity, Kathy knew it was time to make a change. She started on a weight loss program that helps her count calories, without depriving her of the foods she loves.

Kathy O'Connel, Patient

They don't say, you can, never have ice cream, you can never have a hamburger, you can never have a hotdog, you can never have a potato chip. You just learn to make choices in what you eat.

Narrator

While Kathy's quest to lose weight continues,
She has already lost 40 pounds in 9 months, quite an accomplishment.
And research suggests Kathy is right on track. Losing ½ to 2 pounds a week by eating better and exercising more is the best way to lose weight and keep it off.
Later, we'll try to unravel the cause of this complicated condition

But first, a "Health for Life" fact... true or false... fresh fruits and vegetables are more nutritious than frozen or canned?

The answer, when we return.

Narrator

In a moment, we'll meet one woman who says an angel on earth helped her to lose over 50 pounds.

But first, the answer to our "Health for Life" fact. True or false... fresh fruits and vegetables are more nutritious than frozen or canned?

False. Frozen fruits and vegetables can be just as nutritious as fresh. That's because, frozen or canned produce is often packaged right after it has been picked, which helps keep most of its nutrients.

Unlike most diseases, obesity can occur in many different patients for many different reasons, making treatment that much harder.

Mari Mondelo remembers the frustration and pain she endured for over ten years, while trying to find a reason for her sudden weight gain.

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Mari Mondelo, Patient

I always found an excuse, a doctor would say, well, as you get older you gain some pounds here and there, or because you are pregnant you are going to gain some more weight.

Narrator

Mari was confused and scared.

Mari Mondelo, Patient

Things got me really worried once I realized that I was doing the exercise, I was eating less and less, and still the weight was piling up and up and up.

Norma Gonzalez
Nutritionist/Dietician

You look great, you look very, very good.

Narrator

After what seemed like a lifetime of looking for answers, Mari found nutritionist and dietician Norma Gonzalez... a woman she now calls her angel on earth.

Norma Gonzalez
Nutritionist/Dietician

Mari had gestational diabetes. And she was concerned about her blood glucose because she could develop diabetes if she doesn't lose weight.

Norma Gonzalez
Nutritionist/Dietician

Ok, let's see your weight now because I think you lost like 4 pounds more.

Narrator

After carefully assessing Mari's food intake, Norma quickly discovered Mari did not have a problem with overeating. Her problem was an excess of carbohydrates in her diet.

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Mari Mondelo, Patient

Once I learned I had to count my carbs, it was like wow! A miracle had happened. Someone opened my eyes to a new idea that I hadn't explored and I tried it and it worked!

Narrator

But in order to reduce the number of carbohydrates in her diet, Mari had to learn what foods to avoid. And some came as quite a shock! Foods high in carbohydrates that Mari now avoids include white flour products like white bread, saltines and bagels, rice cereal, grains like instant rice, fruit juices, pastas and some fruits, including bananas, raisins and pineapple. Although reducing the amount of carbohydrates worked for Mari, Norma says you should never cut out a major food group from your daily diet without first consulting with your doctor or healthcare provider.

Norma Gonzalez, Nutritionist/Dietician

Let's review about reading labels.

Narrator

Mari also learned the proper way to read food labels, a must when it comes to watching your intake of carbohydrates, fats and calories.

Reading labels is easy if you know what to look for.

Here's how... check the serving size. All the nutritional facts listed are based on one serving size, so you can adjust your calories and fat accordingly.

The servings per container will tell you how many serving sizes are in the package.

The calorie listing is the total number of calories you will consume in one serving.

And the calories from fat listing reflects the number of fat calories the product provides per serving.

Along with healthier eating habits, exercise has also played a role in Mari's 50-pound weight loss.

Mari Mondelo, Patient

I had to start with like 5 minutes, ten minutes, because I told you before there were days I couldn't go around the block! So I took it little by little and I reached my goal of an hour of exercise a day.

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Mari learned you don't have to buy an expensive membership to a gym, to start an effective exercise plan of your own.
And the benefits of exercise along with a good eating plan can be substantial... take a look:

Walking for an hour a day burns up to 500 calories... combine that with just 500 calories less in your daily diet, and you can lose more than 25 pounds in 90 days!
Mari says she still has 20 pounds to go... she believes she'll get there and she credits part of her weight loss success, to never looking back.

Mari Mondelo, Patient

Stop the questioning; leave the moment right there, let it go, and try to do good things for yourself.

Narrator

Still ahead, we'll meet a young boy and his family, who look to turn back the hands of time, after he was diagnosed with type ii diabetes at age 11.
But first, here's a "health for life" fact...

Did you know that each gram of fat has 2 ¼ times the amount of calories as a gram of protein or carbohydrate? For example, a teaspoon of sugar, rice or tuna fish all have the same amount of calories, but a teaspoon of olive oil has more than twice as many.
So, if you want to eat more and gain less... lose the fatty foods and substitute leaner, low fat choices!

Narrator

Obesity onset at any age is a problem. But if it occurs in childhood and lasts into adolescence, the likelihood of a child becoming an obese adult is very high.

Daisy Merrey, MD **Weight Loss Specialist**

60% of obese the children will become the fat Americans of tomorrow

Narrator

For Dan Stachura, this reality hits close to home.
He knows all about being overweight. He's been heavy as long as he can remember, and the memories haven't always been pleasant.

Dan Stachura, Patient

I'd always be a lot bigger than the other kids, like they'd be real skinny and I was like really big, so that kind of made me feel real bad.

Narrator

Adopted as an infant, Dan's parents say their son was always a big child. Rick and his wife felt it was only a matter of time before their son outgrew his problem. But as Dan grew older, his activity level decreased and his weight increased. Then, just two years ago, as a consequence of his weight gain, Dan was diagnosed with type two diabetes. His parents were shocked.

Rick Stachura, Father

Once he was diagnosed with diabetes, this really brought it home, it's like, we have to do something because now it's a major health issue.

William Dietz, PhD.
Center for Disease Control and Prevention

One of the most obvious complications of childhood obesity has been type ii diabetes. A type of diabetes that we previously thought only occurred in older adults. And now it's clear that it's beginning to appear in children.

Narrator

It is estimated that one out of four children in the United States is obese, and the numbers continue to grow.

There has been an almost 40% increase in obesity among adolescents in the past 15 years. And obesity continues to put our children at high risk for diabetes, heart disease, stroke low self-esteem and social rejection.

In an effort to combat this, Rick and his wife have instituted healthier eating habits for the entire family.

Rick Stachura, Father

I think the issue of do as I do, is much more important than do as I say in most cases like this, working with the child gives them the impetus to continue on and learn that better habit.

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Better, healthier habits that doctors say can benefit anyone at any age suffering from Type 2 Diabetes. Along with a sensible diet, Dan found a fun way to add physical activity to his routine and boost his self-esteem.

Dan Stachura, Patient

Tae-Kwon-Do, it originated from Korea and that's where I'm from, so it kind of helped me there to do something that is kind of part of my heritage and all the teachers try and help you and build your confidence and help you along.

Narrator

Here are a few more exercise suggestions perfect for any child... shooting basketball hoops for 30 minutes, fast dancing for 30 minutes, jumping rope for 15 minutes, or swimming laps for 20 minutes, 3 to 5 days a week.

Dan's parents couldn't be happier about their son's new way of life.

Rick Stachura, Father

It makes me feel better, because I know he has a better chance in 20, 30 40, years from now, in being able to either slow or totally eliminate the side effects and the other morbidity that comes along with diabetes.

So by watching his weight and by exercising, maintaining a reasonably good diet, I think he'll do fine

Narrator

Up next, we'll have some helpful hints to start you on your way to a healthy life free from the complications of obesity. And find out what medical professionals think needs to be done to stop the obesity epidemic in its tracks.

In recent years, obesity has gained more recognition as a chronic disease... but still, many patients are reluctant to take the necessary steps towards weight loss.

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention's Dr. Dietz explains.

William Dietz, PhD.

Center for Disease Control and Prevention

I think awareness is increasing but I don't think we know yet whether that awareness is going to increase into action whether it is going to prompt people to become more physically active or change the way they're eating.

Narrator

He says denial may also play a role in the state of obesity in America.

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William Dietz, PhD. **Center for Disease Control and Prevention**

We talk about obesity and yet I don't think that most people who are overweight think of themselves as obese. I think secondly that people who are overweight think it's a cosmetic problem and not a health problem.

Narrator

Dr. Mery says this is one reason dieters often turn to fad diets for a quick fix, but the fact remains, fad diets can not provide safe, long term weight loss. Although you may lose weight at first, they can be unhealthy, preventing your body from getting all the essential nutrients it needs. Fad diets may also seriously limit or forbid certain foods, leading to boredom and only short-term success.

How can patients take control of their lives to achieve safe, long-term weight loss? Doctors say it's important to set realistic goals.

Norma Gonzalez **Nutritionist/Dietician**

Set one goal at a time, so if you are eating a lot of carbohydrates, start first with the carbohydrates.

Narrator

Instead of depriving yourself of the foods you love, make sensible substitutions.

Antonio Gotto, MD **Professor of Medicine, Cornell Univ.**

Let's start with the saturated or animal fat, instead of whole milk and cream, substitute low-fat milk, which means 1% or ½ %. Instead of eating fatty meats, eat meat which have a lower fat content for example chicken or fish which has a different type of fat then say beef or pork.

Narrator

Add moderate exercise to your daily routine.

Norma Gonzalez **Nutritionist/Dietician**

Exercise is not specifically to lose weight. It's more to increase your metabolic rate and for maintenance. But it has to go together with the diet. Control the calories you eat, you exercise more, then you will have better results.

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Narrator

And finally and here's the "Expert's Action Plan" to make it all happen:

First, determine the status of your obesity problem by calculating your body mass index.

Second, understand your personal situation. Learn the role food plays in your life and what you can do to alter it.

Third, learn to eat consciously by reading food labels so you can begin to choose foods that are best for you.

By adding lifestyle changes like these into your life, you too, can take control of your life and your health.

For Kathy, counting calories has given her a second chance at mobility and freedom.

For Mari, cutting down her carbohydrate intake has helped her to decrease the likelihood of being diagnosed with diabetes.

Dan has learned to increase his activity level to improve his diabetic condition, and slow the progression of the disease so he too can live a life full of hope, happiness and the promise of a new day!