

Achieving Healthy Weight and Obesity Prevention



The Public Health Challenge

Disability and obesity are complex public health challenges, but ones that offer major dividends to our country if effective strategies are successfully applied. Communities (state, regional, local and neighborhood) provide a vital role in implementing steps to help combat obesity among people with disabilities and assist them in achieving healthy weight and an improved quality of life.

What is Healthy Weight?

Healthy weight is the weight appropriate for a person's height and is based on a balance of calories consumed and calories used. People with disabilities may have difficulty achieving and maintaining a healthy weight. While most who are not at a healthy weight are usually overweight or obese, some are underweight. This brief addresses the issue of disability and obesity.

Considerations to Addressing Obesity and Disability in the Community

1. **Recognize the nature and scope of the problem, and the relationship between obesity and disability** through expanded research that better describes disability/obesity risks.
2. **Identify sustainable public health strategies to promote healthy weight and physical activity that includes people with disabilities.**
3. **Develop an expanded national awareness of the problem.**
4. **Help create strategic alliances and partnerships** to create and disseminate effective strategies and messages to disability communities.
5. **Implement evidence-based public health programs, practices or policies.**
6. **Evaluate impact of programs, practices, and policies.**

Additional Considerations

While disability and obesity are related, we do not know exactly how one influences the other. Some of the higher risk of obesity may be due to:

- Disability-related prescription drug use that leads to weight gain;
- Difficulties in finding ways to remain physically active;
- Challenges in maintaining a proper diet/healthy eating that go beyond challenges faced by the general population;
- Obesity itself may also lead to a disability as well as exacerbate an existing disability.

The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Improve Health and Wellness of Person with Disabilities

In 2005, the Surgeon General's *Call to Action to Improve the Health and Wellness of Persons with Disabilities* brought attention to the public health challenges that people with disabilities face. Achieving and maintaining healthy weight is one such challenge.

Did You Know?

- Disability affects more than 56 million people in the United States.
- There are many types of disabilities, such as those that affect a person's: hearing, vision, movement, thinking, remembering, learning, communicating, mental health, and social relationships.
- Obesity is more common among people with disabilities than for people without disabilities and is an important risk factor for other health conditions.
- Annual health care expenditures associated with disability are estimated at \$400 billion.
- Obesity-related health care expenditures for adults are estimated at \$147 billion annually, with annual per person spending almost \$1,500 more for someone who is obese compared with someone with a healthy weight.

People with disabilities strive to live long, healthy, and productive lives. This issue brief described considerations to better understand the relationship between disability and obesity and help people with disabilities achieve and maintain healthy weight through sustainable public health strategies that promote physical activity and healthy eating.

CDC funds activities to evaluate physical activity and healthy weight management for people with limb loss/limb difference, paralysis, and Intellectual Disabilities.

RESEARCH:

CDC conducts research that describes rates of obesity in people with disabilities, including type of disability. Further research, testing, and evaluation could lead to developing more valid and reliable ways to accurately assess, measure, and/or reduce obesity and its related health risks among populations with disabilities.

COLLABORATION:

Public health approaches that can reach large numbers of people in multiple settings—such as child care facilities, workplaces, schools, communities, and health care facilities—can help people make healthier choices.

For more information, please contact Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
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