

# Overweight and Obesity

## Among People with Disabilities

The importance of overweight and obesity related to people with disabilities is a particular problem of public health importance. Obesity is more prevalent among people with disabilities than for people without disabilities and is an important risk factor for other health conditions.

Overweight and obesity are both labels for ranges of weight that are greater than what is generally considered healthy for a given height. The terms also identify ranges of weight that have been shown to increase the likelihood of certain diseases and other health problems. Behavior, environment, and genetic factors can affect whether a person is overweight or obese.

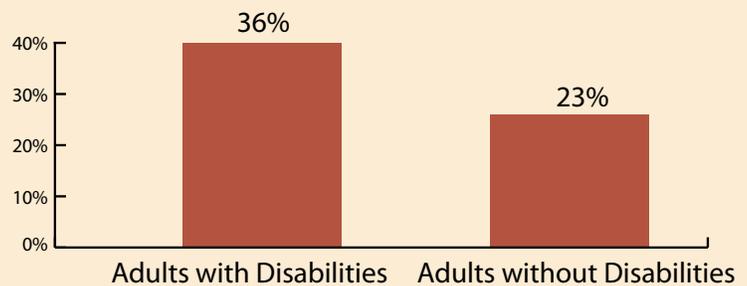
For adults, overweight and obesity ranges are determined by using weight and height to calculate a number called the “body mass index” (BMI). BMI is used because, for most people, it correlates with their amount of body fat.

- An adult who has a BMI between 25 and 29.9 is considered overweight.
- An adult who has a BMI of 30 or higher is considered obese.

Percentage of Obesity Among Adults by Disability Status

*Obesity rates for adults with disabilities are approximately 57% higher than for adults without disabilities.*

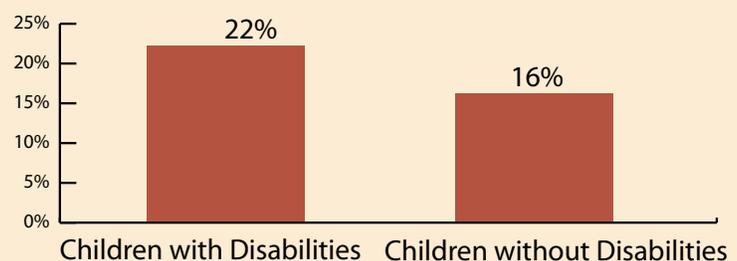
*From the 2008 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System.*



Percentage of Obesity Among Children, Ages 2 -17, by Disability Status

*Obesity rates for children with disabilities are approximately 38% higher than for children without disabilities.*

*From the 2003-2008 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES)*



Among children of the same age and sex, overweight is defined on CDC growth charts as a BMI at or above the 85th percentile and lower than the 95th percentile. Obesity is defined as having a BMI at or above the 95th percentile.

## Did You Know?

- Researchers have shown that BMI may not be the best measurement for some people with disabilities.
  - For example, BMI can underestimate the amount of fat in people with spinal cord injuries who may have less lean muscle mass.
- Some researchers prefer measuring a person's waist where extra fat may be on the body and using other methods to determine if a person is overweight or obese.

## Challenges Facing People with Disabilities

People with disabilities can find it more difficult to always eat healthy, control their weight, and be physically active. This might be due to:



- A lack of healthy food choices.
- Difficulty with chewing or swallowing food, or with the taste or texture of foods.
- Medications that can contribute to weight gain, weight loss, and changes in appetite.
- Physical limitations that can reduce a person's ability to exercise.
- Pain.
- A lack of energy.
- A lack of accessible environments (for example, sidewalks, parks, and exercise equipment) that can enable exercise.
- A lack of resources (for example, money; transportation; and social support from family, friends, neighbors, and community members).

## Physical Activity for People with Disabilities

Evidence shows that regular physical activity provides important health benefits for people with disabilities.<sup>1</sup> Benefits include improved cardiovascular and muscle fitness, improved mental health, and a better ability to do tasks of daily life.

Sufficient evidence now exists to recommend that adults with disabilities should get regular physical activity. Learn more about Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans at <http://www.health.gov/PAGuidelines> and [www.ncpad.org](http://www.ncpad.org)

*Physical activity can help people of all abilities improve their overall health and fitness, and reduces the risk for many chronic diseases.*





## The Obesity Epidemic

Obesity affects different people in different ways and may increase the risk for other health conditions among people with and without disabilities.

### For people with disabilities:

- Children and adults with mobility limitations and intellectual or learning disabilities are at greatest risk for obesity.<sup>1,2,3</sup>
- 20% of children 10 through 17 years of age who have special health care needs are obese compared with 15% of children of the same ages without special health care needs.<sup>6</sup>
- Annual health care costs of obesity that are related to disability are estimated at approximately \$44 billion.<sup>4</sup>

### In the United States:

- More than one-third of adults—more than 72 million people—in the United States are obese.<sup>5</sup>
- Obesity rates are significantly higher among racial and ethnic groups. Non-Hispanic Blacks or African Americans have a 51% higher obesity prevalence and Hispanics have a 21% higher obesity prevalence than non-Hispanic Whites.<sup>7</sup>
- Annual health care costs of obesity for all adults in the United States were estimated to be as high as \$147 billion dollars for 2008.<sup>4</sup>



## Health Consequences of Overweight and Obesity

Overweight and obesity increases the risk of a number of other conditions, including:

- Coronary heart disease
- Type 2 diabetes
- Cancers (endometrial, breast, and colon)
- High blood pressure
- Lipid disorders (for example, high total cholesterol or high levels of triglycerides)
- Stroke
- Liver and gallbladder disease
- Sleep apnea and respiratory problems
- Osteoarthritis (a degeneration of cartilage and its underlying bone within a joint)
- Gynecological problems (abnormal periods, infertility)

## Learn more about...

Healthy weight

<http://www.cdc.gov/healthyweight/>

Obesity

<http://www.cdc.gov/obesity/>

Physical activity and disability

<http://www.ncpad.org/>

Disability and healthy living

<http://www.cdc.gov/disabilities>

## References

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4. Finkelstein E, Trogdon J, Cohen J, Dietz W. Annual medical spending attributable to obesity: Payer- and service-specific estimates. *Health Affairs* 28, 5(2009):w822-31.
5. Ogden CL, Carroll MD, McDowell MA, Flegal KM. Obesity among adults in the United States— no change since 2003–2004. NCHS data brief no 1. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics. 2007.
6. Child and Adolescent Health Measurement Initiative. National Survey of Children's Health, 2007. Data Resource Center on Child and Adolescent Health website. Retrieved 05/08/2009 from <http://www.nschdata.org>.
7. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Differences in Prevalence of Obesity Among Black, White, and Hispanic Adults --- United States, 2006—2008. *MMWR*, July 17 2009;58(27):740-44. Available at <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5827a2.htm>

**NCBDDD Atlanta:** For more information please contact CDC

1600 Clifton Road NE,  
Atlanta, GA 30333

1-800-CDC-INFO (232-4636)

**TTY:** 1-888-232-63548

**Email:** [cdcinfo@cdc.gov](mailto:cdcinfo@cdc.gov)

**Web:** [www.cdc.gov/disabilities](http://www.cdc.gov/disabilities)

