



Overweight and Obesity

A growing problem in the Pacific

Obesity and overweight are growing problems throughout the world, and particularly in the Pacific. In ten Pacific Island countries and territories, at least 50 per cent of the population are either overweight or obese.

What is the difference between obesity and overweight?

Obesity is much more likely to cause serious health problems than being overweight.

The most common way of seeing if someone has a healthy weight is using the 'Body Mass Index' (BMI). This uses height and weight to give a score.

You can use a special chart to assess if someone is of a healthy weight (these charts can be ordered from SPC, see address below). This allows you to use pounds or kg and metres or feet and inches to find out what someone's BMI is. The chart also shows whether or not a person is classed as obese or overweight.

In the Pacific we use the following values

BMI between 27 and 32 = overweight

BMI over 32 = obese

Note: Outside the Pacific region, different BMI standards are used. (BMI between 25 and 30 is overweight and over 30 is obese.) The Pacific standards take into account the more muscled build found among the people in the Pacific.

To calculate BMI if you don't have a chart:

You need the person's height in metres (e.g. 1.6 m) and their weight in kg (e.g. 75.5 kg).

$$\text{BMI} = \text{weight} \div (\text{height} \times \text{height})$$

$$= 75.5 \div (1.6 \times 1.6)$$

$$= 75.5 \div (2.56)$$

$$= 29.5$$

So this person is overweight, but not obese.

Another way to see if someone is overweight or not is by measuring their waist circumference. You can measure around the waist (narrowest part of waist or across the navel) with a tape measure or marked piece of string.

It is recommended that waist measurement is:

less than 94 cm (37 inches) for men, and less than 80 cm (32 inches) for women.

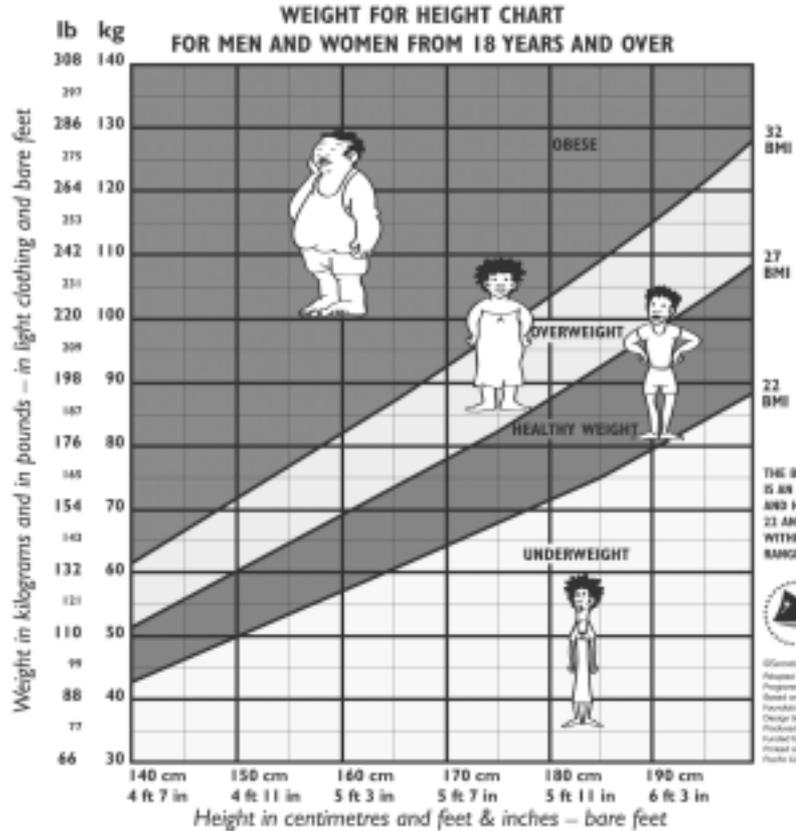
What are the risks from overweight and obesity?

When someone is overweight or obese, they may have symptoms including: feeling uncomfortable, getting tired quickly, shortness of breath, back-ache, and aching leg and hip joints.

There are also long-term risks, which are serious. Being obese is associated with increased risks of hypertension (high blood pressure), cardiovascular disease (heart disease) and diabetes.

Aim for a healthy weight

A guide for Pacific Islanders



Causes of overweight and obesity

The body needs energy (sometimes called calories) to move and to keep all the organs working. The more active we are, the more energy we need. We get energy from the foods that we eat and drink. If we eat more energy (in foods and drinks) than we use, then the body will store that extra energy as fat. People who are overweight are carrying lots of extra energy stores (fat). This is because in the past they have eaten more energy than they needed. The amount of energy that people need just to stay alive (e.g. to keep the heart beating etc.) varies – generally, men and larger/taller people will need more energy than smaller people and females. There are exceptions, and this is why you will notice that some people seem to eat a lot, not be active, but never gain weight (their body uses a lot of energy just to stay alive). There are also those who eat very little but gain weight (their body is very efficient and doesn't need much energy).

Methods of losing weight

The only way to lose weight is to make sure that the energy eaten is less than the energy needed. There are two ways to do this:

- ☞ Eat less energy – from foods and drinks
- ☞ Use more energy – through physical activity. Walking is good exercise. Aim to increase the amount of exercise/activity you do each day.

A combination of the two is best.

Dietary advice

You need to look at what you are eating and drinking, and then try to reduce the amount of energy (calories) you are taking in. That doesn't mean just eating less – but rather looking at the types of foods you eat as well. Remember that the diet must still be healthy and balanced.

- ☞ Eat more fresh fruits and vegetables (they are low in energy and healthy).
- ☞ Drink plenty of water.
- ☞ Eat fewer fatty and sugary foods (which are high in energy).



Fatty foods

- ⚡ Eat fewer fatty foods, such as SPAM and corned beef, coconut cream, cakes, biscuits and cookies;
- ⚡ Use less margarine and butter on bread. Eat fewer fried foods such as doughnuts and pancakes, and fewer fried meals. Instead try grilling, boiling or steaming food.

Sugary foods

- ⚡ Eat fewer cookies, cakes, candies and sweets, sodas, and fizzy drinks; and use less sugar in tea/coffee.

Weight loss

Aim for 1–2 pounds (0.5–1 kg) weight loss per week. Losing weight too fast can cause problems. Missing meals and fast weight-loss programmes have been shown to be short-term (people do not maintain the weight loss).

The best plan to lose weight or to stay a healthy weight is to eat a healthy diet and at the same time do regular physical activity.

Calories/energy versus size of meals

Many people who are trying to control their weight may try to just eat less food. They put less on their plate, or even use a smaller plate. While this will probably help them to lose weight, this approach can result in the following problems:

- ⚡ If the diet was not balanced initially (the correct proportions of the three food groups, variety), eating less of all foods will mean

that there is a very high risk of the person missing out on certain nutrients they need.

- ⚡ Eating less food in terms of volume often makes people hungry (for a while until they get used to it). This makes it difficult for the person to follow their plan and they may end up snacking or giving up.

The term 'diet' is now used most commonly to refer to a type of strict eating plan that a person follows as a short-term measure to try and lose weight (very different to their normal daily eating pattern). It may involve 'no sweet things,' 'no snacks,' 'no fried foods,' 'missing meals,' or some such plan. Across the world, millions of dollars are spent on special diet products; millions of people are following a special 'diet' at any time. Yet across the world people are getting fatter. Why? 'Diets' don't work!

People who go 'on a diet' eventually want to come 'off the diet,' When this happens, they inevitably regain any lost weight. They enter into a cycle of weight gain and weight loss.

Research shows that the best long-term method of losing weight and keeping the weight off is to change your lifestyle – adopt sensible eating habits and do more activity.

Eating less energy/calories

This does not have to involve just eating less food. It is the type of food eaten that is important.

- ⚡ Fat contains twice as many calories/energy by weight than any other food.
- ⚡ Sugar is often found in foods with little nutritional value except for energy.
- ⚡ Alcoholic drinks contain a lot of calories/energy.

By eating less fat and sugar, and eating more fruits and vegetables, you can eat a similar amount (volume/weight), while eating less energy/calories. This approach is easier to maintain than just eating less food overall. You can eat foods that are high in fats and sugars; the important aspect is size and frequency. You need to eat these foods less often and in smaller amounts – include them as a treat, rather than a daily staple.

Here are some comparisons between some different meals/ snacks for your information:

Food item	Fat (g)	Energy (kj)
Slice of white toast (27 g)	0.8	329
Slice of white toast with butter/margarine (5 g)	5	481
1 boiled egg	5.5	315
1 fried egg	10.7	535
Taro (boiled) one 100 g portion	0.6	407
Taro (100 g) with coconut milk (2 spoons)	7.9	725
Fresh tuna – grilled/barbecued (100 g)	11.7	861
Canned fish in oil (drained) 100 g	13.7	922
1 doughnut (45 g)	9.9	823
Slice of fresh papaya (100 g)	0.1	207

Over a day, if this person:

- ✘ ate a boiled egg instead of a fried egg;
- ✘ ate their toast without butter;
- ✘ ate taro boiled without coconut milk;
- ✘ ate fresh tuna instead of canned tuna; and
- ✘ missed out on a doughnut and had a piece of papaya instead;

THEN...they would have eaten 28.5 g less fat and 1367 kj less energy, BUT the same amount of food!

