

International Obesity Collaborative

5 Principles of Obesity



Obesity is a chronic disease impacting populations worldwide. People living with obesity face weight bias, stigma, discrimination, and challenges accessing empathetic evidenced-based healthcare. To ensure that obesity is treated with the same level of compassion and respect given to other chronic diseases, it is important that these five key principles are understood:

Principle #1. IT IS UNDENIABLE THAT OBESITY IS A COMPLEX, CHRONIC DISEASE.

Obesity is a chronic disease. It can last for a lifetime and requires ongoing management. Obesity should be diagnosed by a qualified healthcare professional based on an appropriate medical assessment. Obesity cannot be cured, but it can be controlled, like other chronic diseases such as diabetes or high blood pressure. Obesity is associated with more than 200 weight-related health conditions including heart disease, type II diabetes, and many cancers. Obesity also affects overall quality of life, and sense of well-being. These health impacts vary based on a person's ethnicity, race, and age.

Principle #2. OBESITY IS DRIVEN BY POWERFUL UNDERLYING BIOLOGY, NOT BY CHOICE.

Obesity is a chronic disease resulting from the complex interactions between genetic, environmental, behavioral, and social factors. Obesity is not a personal failure or the sole result of a lack of willpower. Weight and/or BMI is not the only indicator of obesity. When someone with obesity loses weight, the underlying contributing factors that contributed to obesity still exist. Weight loss leads to powerful biological responses that increase appetite, decrease energy expenditure, and promote weight regain.

Principle #3. THE MANY HEALTH EFFECTS OF EXCESS WEIGHT CAN START EARLY.

The health complications associated with obesity can start early in life, and the longer obesity is left untreated, the greater the potential impact of these negative effects. Preventing excess weight gain has positive health benefits. Although prevention efforts are important, they may be insufficient for many people to avoid developing obesity.

Principle #4. OBESITY IS TREATABLE.

Multiple evidenced-based treatments are available to treat obesity including intensive behavioral therapy, surgical interventions, and pharmacotherapy. Like other chronic diseases, such as high blood pressure and type II diabetes, effective management of obesity requires ongoing lifelong treatment. Obesity care and weight loss are not the same. The treatment of obesity focuses on overall health, not just weight reduction.

Principle #5. WEIGHT BIAS, STIGMA, AND DISCRIMINATION ARE HARMFUL.

People with obesity often face stigma and bias which can manifest as discrimination. Discrimination can affect self-esteem and or access to quality healthcare. Every person deserves appropriate treatment regardless of body size. The decision to seek treatment for obesity is a personal one, and a person's choice should be respected.

International Obesity Collaborative Members



About the IOC The member organizations collaborate to develop consensus statements and evidence-based education about obesity to share around the globe.