

# CARDIOVASCULAR

# DISEASE and the link between overweight and obesity



## What is overweight and obesity?

Overweight and obese are terms used to describe the body weight of people who are carrying excess body fat. To determine whether someone is overweight or obese, their body mass index (BMI) is calculated using their height and weight.

Becoming overweight or obese happens gradually as a result of either:

- consuming more energy (kilojoules from food and drinks) than your body needs
- consuming more energy (kilojoules from food and drinks) than your body uses by being active
- a combination of both.

Overweight and obesity is harmful to health as it increases a person's risk of chronic diseases including cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes and some cancers. It also increases their risk of other health issues, including high blood pressure, gallbladder disease, fertility problems, lower back pain and sleep apnoea.

The more excess weight a person is carrying, the higher their risk of health issues.

Want to find out if you are in the healthy weight range? Learn more at [www.livelifghter.com.au/bmi](http://www.livelifghter.com.au/bmi).

## What is cardiovascular disease?

Cardiovascular disease is a term used to describe all diseases and conditions involving the heart and blood vessels. In Australia, the main types of cardiovascular diseases are coronary heart disease, stroke and heart failure<sup>1</sup>. Cardiovascular disease is often referred to as heart disease.

Cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death in Australia, responsible for nearly 44,000 deaths in 2012<sup>2</sup>. On average, cardiovascular disease is the cause for one death every 12 minutes. Although heart disease is slightly higher in men, it kills three times more Australian women than breast cancer.

## What causes cardiovascular disease?

Cardiovascular disease is caused by a number of risk factors that are either modifiable (risk factors you can change) or non-modifiable (risk factors you cannot change). It is important to remember that your risk of cardiovascular disease does not just depend on your body size, but also other risk factors including:

### Factors you can change (modifiable)

- ▲ Poor diet
  - Low fruit and vegetable intake
  - Excess intake of saturated fat and salt
- ▲ Being overweight or obese
- ▲ High blood cholesterol
- ▲ High blood pressure
- ▲ Smoking
- ▲ Alcohol
- ▲ Physical inactivity

### Factors you cannot change (non-modifiable)

- ▲ Age
- ▲ Genetic makeup
- ▲ Ethnic background
- ▲ Body shape or body fat distribution (where you store fat)

## How is cardiovascular disease related to overweight and obesity?

Excess body weight is associated with increased risk of cardiovascular disease. The further above the healthy weight range a person is, the higher their risk of cardiovascular disease. Nearly two thirds of Australian adults (63%) and one in four (25%) of Australian children are now overweight or obese. This increases their risk of high blood pressure, high cholesterol and heart disease.

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### How is cardiovascular disease related to overweight and obesity?

The amount of extra body fat a person is carrying is only one factor. Where a person stores their body fat is also important. People who store fat around their waist are more likely to develop heart disease than those who store fat in their lower body (hips and thighs). Therefore, waist measurement is a good way to check a person's risk of cardiovascular disease.

Lifestyle factors that affect overweight and obesity, such as poor diet and physical inactivity, also increase a person's risk of high blood pressure and high blood cholesterol. High blood pressure and high blood cholesterol are major risk factors for coronary heart disease and stroke in their own right. As blood pressure and blood cholesterol levels get closer to the normal range, a person's risk of cardiovascular disease reduces.

Fortunately, overweight or obesity are modifiable risk factors for cardiovascular disease, meaning they are preventable or at least partly reversible through changes to diet and physical activity. Eating a diet high in fruit and vegetables, limiting your alcohol intake and doing regular physical activity can help you achieve and maintain a healthy weight and reduce your risk of cardiovascular disease.

### What can I do to reduce my risk of overweight/obesity?

Our weight generally comes down to two factors: how much we eat and drink (energy in) and how active we are (energy out). It is all about achieving a balance. If you are aiming for weight loss, increase energy out (by being physically active) and reduce energy in (by eating healthy food).

To achieve and maintain a healthy weight, the best things you can do are to:

- ▲ Eat a variety of nutritious foods from the Australian Guide to Healthy Eating
- ▲ Limit intake of foods high in saturated fat, added sugar and salt
- ▲ Be physically active every day

For good health and to help you reach your healthy weight goals, we recommend following our top tips to LiveLighter®:

- ▲ Watch your portion size
- ▲ Avoid sugary drinks
- ▲ Sit less
- ▲ Cut back on salt
- ▲ Cut back on alcohol
- ▲ Watch the fats you eat
- ▲ Go for 2 fruit and 5 veg
- ▲ Cut back on added sugar
- ▲ Choose healthy snacks
- ▲ Be active every day

Working to achieve a healthy weight will help to lower your risk of chronic disease. However, it is important to note that no matter what your size or weight is, being physically active and eating well will improve your health.

For more information on how to achieve and maintain a healthy weight for good health, visit the following websites:

- LiveLighter®: [www.livelighter.com.au](http://www.livelighter.com.au)
- Eat for Health: [www.eatforhealth.gov.au](http://www.eatforhealth.gov.au)
- Heart Foundation: [www.heartfoundation.org.au](http://www.heartfoundation.org.au)
- Cancer Council Victoria: [www.cancervic.org.au](http://www.cancervic.org.au)
- Diabetes Australia: [www.diabetesaustralia.com.au](http://www.diabetesaustralia.com.au)

If you think you are overweight or obese, we encourage you to see your doctor or an Accredited Practising Dietitian for personalised advice.

<sup>1</sup>Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2011. Cardiovascular disease: Australian facts 2011. Cardiovascular disease series. Cat. no. CVD 53. Canberra: AIHW.

<sup>2</sup>Australian Bureau of Statistics. Causes of death 2012 (3303.0). March 2014.

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