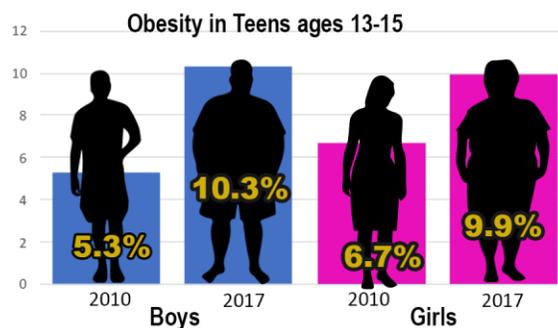


OBESITY: ARE WE GROWING OUT OF CONTROL?

What is overweight/obesity?

Overweight and obesity are defined as abnormal or excessive fat accumulation within the body, that presents a major risk to health.¹ Obesity is a major risk factor for a number of chronic non-communicable diseases, including type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular diseases and at least 12 types of cancer.² The World Health Organization (WHO) shows that obesity rates have nearly tripled since 1975. In 2016, more than 1.9 billion adults, 18 years and older, were overweight and over 650 million were obese.¹

The 2016-2017 Jamaica Health and Lifestyle Survey (III) showed that one in two Jamaicans (54%), 15 years or older, are overweight/obese including two-thirds of Jamaican women.³ Between 2010 and 2017, obesity in teens aged 13-15 almost doubled from 5.3% to 10.3% (94% increase) for boys and in girls increased from 6.7% to 9.9% (47% increase), according to the Global School-based Student Health Surveys for 2010 and 2017.^{4,5} The 2017 results also show that 69.1% of Jamaicans aged 13-17 are obese (73.3% boys and 65.1% girls).



How is obesity measured?

You can tell if you are overweight or obese by using a method known as the body mass index (BMI). BMI is a measure of whether you are a healthy weight for your height.⁶ However, the BMI should be considered as a rough guide because it may not correspond to the same degree of fatness in different persons. Here is a quick guide to knowing your BMI ranges and how to calculate:



What causes overweight and obesity?

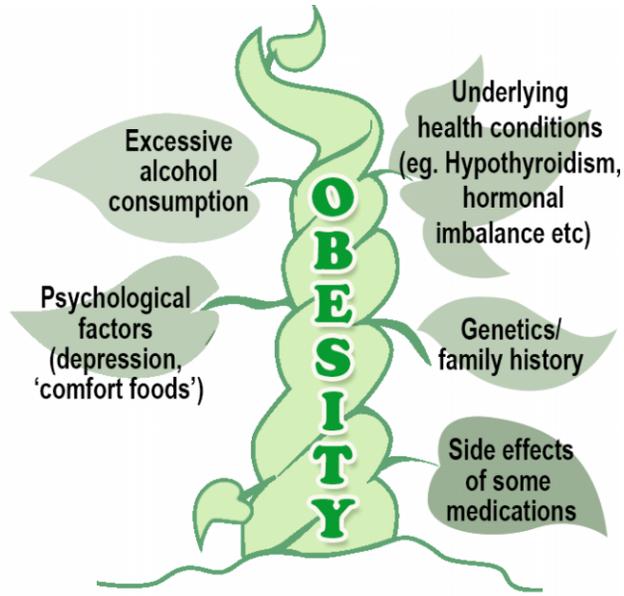
Simply put, the primary cause of overweight and obesity is an imbalance between the amount of energy consumed from foods and the amount of energy your body uses on a daily basis. The excess energy is stored as fat in the body. A diet high in fats and sugar, primarily from low quality, convenience foods and a lack of physical activity are the leading contributors to the increasing rates of obesity, globally.^{1,5}

$$\text{BMI} = \frac{\text{Weight (lbs)}}{\text{Height (in)}^2} \times 703$$

OR

$$\text{BMI} = \frac{\text{Weight (kg)}}{\text{Height (m)} \times \text{Height (m)}}$$

Other causes and risk factors of obesity include:



Preventing and managing obesity

The best way to treat and prevent obesity is to eat a healthy reduced-calorie diet and exercise regularly. Here are some heart-healthy tips:

- ✓ Eat a balanced, calorie-controlled diet as recommended by your doctor or dietitian /nutritionist. Try to get most of your intake from fresh fruits and vegetables, lean meat and fish, ground provisions and whole grains such as whole-wheat bread and flour, whole grain pasta and oatmeal.
- ✓ Get screened regularly to know your health numbers, especially your BMI
- ✓ Practice reading food labels to identify how much nutrients are in your favourite foods and beverages. Foods that provide ‘*empty calories*’ or little to no nutritional value but are high in calories should be kept to a minimum.
- ✓ Take up activities such as brisk walking, jogging, swimming or cycling for 2.5 to 5 hours a week, based on your doctor’s recommendations

- ✓ Eat slowly and avoid situations where you know you could be tempted to overeat
- ✓ Reduce alcohol consumption and quit smoking
- ✓ Seek psychological support to take care of your mental health and reduce dependence on comfort foods

A comprehensive approach

Supportive environments and communities are fundamental in shaping people’s choices, by making the choice of healthier foods and regular physical activity the easiest option, and therefore preventing overweight and obesity.¹ At the societal level, our government and food industry can help to foster healthier food environments by:

- ✓ Implementing evidence-based policies such as front-of-package warning labels (FOPWLs) to help Jamaicans make more informed food choices
- ✓ Restrict marketing of foods high in sugars, salt and fats, especially those targeting children and teens
- ✓ Ensuring the availability of healthy food choices and supporting regular physical activity practice in schools and workplaces
- ✓ Implement a tax on sugary drinks. Just as taxing tobacco helps to reduce tobacco use, taxing sugary drinks can help reduce the overconsumption of sugars, a major contributor to the increasing obesity epidemic.

We can all work together to ensure happier, healthier, and longer lives for everybody!

Remember, there’s nothing sweeter than a healthy lifestyle. Take care of your body and it will last a lifetime!

¹ World Health Organization. (2021). *Obesity and overweight*. World Health Organization. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/obesity-and-overweight>

² World Cancer Research Fund/American Institute for Cancer Research. (2018). *Diet, Nutrition, Physical Activity and Cancer: a Global Perspective. Continuous Update Project Expert Report*. Body fatness and weight gain and the risk of cancer. <https://www.wcrf.org/diet-activity-and-cancer/diet-activity-and-cancer/risk-factors/obesity-weight-gain-and-cancer/>

³ Ministry of Health. (2018). *Jamaica Health and Lifestyle Survey III (2016-2017). Preliminary Key findings*. <https://www.moh.gov.jm/jamaica-health-and-lifestyle-survey-iii-2016-2017/>

⁴ National Council on Drug Abuse. (2010). Global School-based Student Health Survey. <https://extranet.who.int/ncdsmicrodata/index.php/catalog/644/study-description>

Scan the QR code to learn more about the Global Health Advocacy Project

