



Customizable Educational Articles for Use with Your Members

Employers:

The following educational articles were developed by the Midwest Business Group on Health (MBGH), a 501c3 non-profit supporting employers seeking solutions to better manage the high cost of health care and the health and productivity of covered populations. Feel free to use any of the content in these articles or in the optional text below with employees and family members. You can also customize them specific to your programs and benefits through internal communication channels such as your wellbeing newsletter, intranet site, blast emails, etc. We hope you find them helpful in addressing obesity at your organization and supporting your members in their weight loss journey.

Optional Text:

[Your company name] offers a variety of program and resources to support you on your weight management journey including [insert your company's resources and benefits here such as wellbeing and lifestyle management programs, coverage for registered dietitians, disease management, health coaching, fitness programs, etc.]

[Your company name] provides coverage for [anti-obesity medications](#) (AOMs) and bariatric surgery when other weight management efforts are not successful. Talk to your doctor about what options may be best for you. Contact [benefits department, other] to learn more.

Treating Obesity – Learn the Basics

If you or a loved one is overweight or has obesity, you are not alone. Obesity is an epidemic in the U.S., impacting 4 in every 10 adult Americans. Many people believe obesity is just about lifestyle choices, discipline or willpower. However, leading research has shown that it is a complex chronic disease like diabetes or heart disease that increases the risk of developing many medical problems and is associated with poor physical and mental health outcomes and reduced quality of life.

Challenge: Losing Weight *and* Keeping it Off

It's commonly known that certain behaviors, like not getting enough physical activity, unhealthy eating habits and insufficient sleep, can contribute to obesity. Did you know that hormones, appetite signals, and metabolism also play a role? These factors impact how much we eat and why we eat. Another contributor is where we live and work, which can affect access to affordable, healthy food and/or a safe and convenient place to exercise. Eating to cope with stress and depression is a common struggle experienced by people who carry extra weight. Adults with obesity are at higher risk for depression than those with normal weight.

Even after losing weight, many people struggle to keep the pounds off. This is often because the body reacts to weight loss by trying to regain the weight, making maintaining weight loss like a tug-of-war. Metabolism tends to slow down, appetite hormones increase encouraging more calories to be consumed, and the "I feel full" hormones decrease.

Learn About Available Resources

For many reasons, changing behaviors and losing weight are challenging. For the best chance at success, it is critical to find the combination of available resources that works for you. But sifting through all the options that exist can be overwhelming and confusing. Unfortunately, there is no quick fix or simple solution. Where do you begin?

Learn what weight and obesity management programs and benefits are offered to you through your employer and health plan. Be sure to investigate what support your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) provides for behavioral health challenges you may face. This includes help managing the depression and anxiety that often come with having obesity.

Treat obesity just as you would any other serious disease and ask for help. Reach out to your doctor for assistance. Getting support from family and friends is an important component of success. Finally, check out programs available in your community to support you on your weight loss journey. Many are available at little to no cost.

The Good News:

If you're wondering if there is any good news, the answer is yes! Small changes can help jump start efforts and result in big changes over time. Losing even 5% of total body weight can reduce health risks and help the body function better. This means after losing just 10 pounds, a person weighing 200 pounds can see improvements in chronic conditions and other weight-related health issues. These may include:

- Type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and stroke
- High blood pressure and high cholesterol
- Asthma, COPD, and sleep apnea
- Problems with muscles and joints, e.g., osteoarthritis
- Mental health issues including depression and anxiety

Even a small amount of weight loss can improve your ability to do everyday tasks like climbing stairs, carrying groceries, and doing moderate to vigorous physical activity.

Obesity: Finding the Support You Need

For people seeking help to manage obesity, one size does not fit all. Luckily, a variety of resources are available. The key is figuring out which combination works for you. To do this, it's important to first know what benefits, treatment options and/or programs are available through your employer or health plan. These often include:

- Programs to assist with management of health conditions such as type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure and high cholesterol
- Consultations with a registered dietitian
- Company-sponsored wellness screenings and programs for weight loss, healthy eating, stress management and physical activity
- Onsite fitness centers and/or discounts at fitness centers in your community

Employee Assistance Program

Did you know that adults with obesity are at higher risk for depression than those with normal weight? Consider using your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) to support any behavioral health challenges you face on your weight loss/management journey, including depression and anxiety.

Medical Plan Benefits

Some health plans have in-network physicians and other health professionals who specialize in obesity management and helping people lose weight. See if this option is available to you through your employer.

For those with a Body Mass Index (BMI) greater than 35, surgical interventions such as gastric band, gastric sleeve, and gastric bypass may be appropriate. Check if your benefits provide coverage for this type of surgical intervention and/or Centers of Excellence, with high quality physicians, that perform these procedures.

You Are Not Alone

If you are looking for support treating or managing obesity, you are not alone. The obesity epidemic impacts 4 in every 10 adults in the U.S. Although changing behaviors and losing weight can be challenging for many reasons, there is help available. Tap into resources available through your employer, and don't forget about community-based programs and resources often available at little to no cost.

Prescription Plan Benefits

Look into your prescription drug plan to see if FDA-approved anti-obesity medications (AOMs) are covered. They may be recommended in combination with lifestyle modification when other weight loss efforts are not successful, when weight is regained after initial success with lifestyle approaches, or when weight-related complications arise. AOMs can help reduce or control weight by either suppressing appetite or decreasing absorption of calories. Talk with your doctor about what is most appropriate for you.

Sometimes, health care providers use BMI to determine who might benefit from weight loss medications. Based on prescribing criteria, individuals may be considered for an AOM if they have:

- BMI of 30+
- BMI of 27+ along with other weight-related conditions or comorbidities (type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure).

Obesity and Chronic Health Issues

Many people believe obesity is just about lifestyle choices, discipline, or willpower. This could not be further from the truth. Obesity is recognized by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) as a multi-faceted chronic disease, like diabetes or heart disease, that may require long term management. It rarely occurs independent of other chronic conditions. In fact, having obesity is a risk factor for developing many medical problems, also called comorbidities. These often include type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, heart disease, and COPD.

Health problems associated with obesity also include behavioral health issues. Adults with obesity are at higher risk for depression and anxiety than those with normal weight and 43% of adults with depression have obesity.

Musculoskeletal disorders are also a common health consequence of obesity. Excess weight puts stress and strain on muscles and joints, especially the knees and hips, making people with obesity more likely to develop osteoarthritis (OA), the most common type of arthritis. According to the Arthritis Foundation, the rise in the incidence of osteoarthritis is directly related to the increasing prevalence of obesity. In fact, the risk of knee OA is 5x higher in women with obesity and 4x higher in men with obesity.

If you have obesity, managing other chronic conditions that exist, and preventing new ones from developing, are critical to maintaining good health along your weight loss journey. The good news is losing as little as 5% of total body weight can result in clinical improvements in many obesity-related comorbidities. Here are examples of other steps you can take to proactively manage obesity-related health issues.

Action Steps

Know your numbers. This may include cholesterol, blood pressure, and blood sugar and take all medications as prescribed. These steps will help you closely manage health conditions like diabetes and high blood pressure.

Increase physical activity. Be active for at least 30 minutes a day, five days a week (e.g., taking a brisk walk). Regular physical activity can help prevent certain chronic diseases. Being active also contributes to positive mental health.

Take steps to control your environment. Try tactics like bringing healthy snacks to work, doing a weekly menu plan, and avoiding grocery shopping on an empty stomach. Look for safe and convenient ways to add physical activity to your day.

Use your Employee Assistance Program. The EAP is there to help with any behavioral health challenges you may face on your weight loss journey, including depression and anxiety. Check with your employer about how to tap into this useful, confidential resource.

Talk to your doctor. Together you can create a weight management plan that is right for you. Your doctor can also help you understand whether you meet the criteria for FDA-approved anti-obesity medications ([AOMs](#)). These are most often used in conjunction with healthy lifestyle changes when other weight loss efforts are not successful, when weight is regained after initial success with lifestyle approaches, or when weight-related complications arise.

Consider surgical interventions. For those with a Body Mass Index (BMI) greater than 35, surgical interventions may be appropriate. Consider working with a specialist in obesity management to explore your options, including gastric sleeve, gastric band, and gastric bypass. To achieve long term success with these procedures, permanent changes to diet and physical activity are necessary.