

## **Obesity – Facts and Fiction**

In Australia, 60% of adults and over a quarter of children are overweight or obese. Recently, the AMA stated that obesity was as damaging to your health as smoking. What are the facts about being overweight or obese?

### **Why is obesity or being overweight bad?**

- Being overweight increases your risk of illnesses such as cancer, heart disease and stroke, high blood pressure and diabetes. It can cause infertility and contribute to pregnancy complications.
- It contributes to osteoarthritis and joint problems especially in the knees and hips.
- It can cause breathing problems such as sleep apnoea.

### **If you eat a lot, will you become obese?**

- Not necessarily – it depends on what you eat and how much you exercise. People who exercise a lot – over 2 hours a day – or who work in jobs that require physical exertion need to eat more than others who live a sedentary lifestyle. Eating healthy food such as fresh fruit and vegetables and balancing this with exercise will keep you within a healthy weight range.

### **Does anything else contribute to being overweight?**

- Yes; some medications, particularly cortisone and anti-psychotic medications, cause weight gain.
- Stress can contribute to obesity as it lays down fat around the vital organs such as the liver. These people may not look overweight but a body analysis will show the fat.

### **Can you lose weight by eating less and exercising?**

- It will certainly help! Losing weight is complex and may need other action such as nutrition education or counselling to identify factors triggering food selection and eating patterns.

### **Can you be overweight and healthy?**

- Not really. Although your blood pressure and cholesterol may be within healthy limits, the damage you are causing your body will eventually result in ill health such as diabetes.

### **“I’m not fat, I’m big boned”**

- It’s unlikely although some ethnic groups naturally have a more robust physique.

### **“I’ve always been fat – I was a fat child.”**

- Overeating and poor food choice can start in childhood – it doesn’t mean you can’t change it.

### **“Everyone in my family is fat – it’s hereditary”**

- While there may be a genetic link to being overweight it is more likely that everyone in your family has a similar diet and lifestyle which is the cause.

### **“I’m addicted to food”**

- This isn’t possible. Addiction is caused by chemical causing a reaction in your brain – like the nicotine in cigarettes. There is no common chemical in all food. It is more likely you are addicted to the pleasurable feeling of food in your mouth.

### **“I’ve tried to lose weight – it doesn’t work”**

- Losing weight can be a difficult. There are other factors such as nutrition, stress, age and health conditions that may be playing a part. You may need to see professional such as a dietician for help.