



In this newsletter, we will take you through some of the challenges and stigmas that people living with obesity face on a daily basis.

# The stigma of living with obesity

There are many social stereotypes and misconceptions about weight, which means that Canadians who have obesity often face bias and discrimination from strangers, employers, co-workers, the media, friends, family, and even healthcare professionals.<sup>1</sup> This bias and discrimination, especially from healthcare professionals, often prevents those who have obesity from getting proper treatment.<sup>2,3</sup>

## The negative impact of weight bias and obesity stigma



Due to incorrect assumptions about weight gain, society often blames people for having obesity.<sup>4</sup> *Weight bias* refers to the negative attitudes and views about obesity and towards people living with obesity, which may lead to weight discrimination.<sup>1</sup>



**54%** of adults with obesity have reported being stigmatized by their co-workers, facing difficult barriers, such as negative stereotypes, lower hiring success and lower starting salaries, as well as fewer promotions and opportunities in the workplace.<sup>5</sup>



**72%** of images and **77%** of videos in the media negatively portray obesity.<sup>2</sup>



Children in elementary school face a **63%** higher chance of being bullied due to their weight.<sup>5</sup>



Some people living with obesity often **unfairly blame themselves for the prejudice they face**, including verbal, emotional, or physical discrimination. They also encounter challenging barriers in their day-to-day lives, such as undersized seating on buses and planes, difficulty climbing stairs, participating in fewer physical activities with family and friends, as well as dealing with tension about their weight in relationships.<sup>1,6</sup>



Facing such barriers in their environment can lead to feelings of disappointment and the belief that they cannot change or help their situation.<sup>6</sup> However, we now know that there are proven treatment options for the management of obesity.

## Hear from someone living with obesity

"I distinctly recall older relatives being deeply insulting and not feeling embarrassed at all about saying 'you're kind of fat, you need to do something about that...' but no one was harder on me than myself."

Remember there is more to obesity than we may realize. Obesity is a medical condition that can be caused by multiple factors:



Environmental



Genetic



Physiological



Psychological



Socio-economic

## The weight of obesity on Canadians

### Did you know?

The challenges faced by those diagnosed with obesity go beyond physical appearance and coping with weight bias.

In fact, obesity can have a significant impact on health and affect how long a person lives:<sup>7</sup>



Compared to a woman aged 20–39 with a normal BMI, people living with obesity may lose:<sup>8</sup>

- **5–6 years of their lives**



Compared to a man aged 20–39 with a normal BMI, people living with obesity may lose:<sup>8</sup>

- **5–8.5 years of their lives**

Body Mass Index (BMI) = Weight (kg)/Height (m)<sup>2</sup>

Obesity needs to be recognized and treated just like any other chronic disease to help prevent further complications, such as:<sup>9</sup>

- **60–120%** more deaths from diabetes, kidney disease, or liver disease
- **40%** more deaths from heart disease
- **20%** more deaths because of breathing problems
- **55%** increased risk of developing depression<sup>10</sup>
- An increased risk of at least **13** different types of cancer, including breast and colon cancer<sup>11</sup>

In 2011, **an estimated 10,648 early deaths** occurred in Canada as a direct consequence of obesity.<sup>12</sup> Not only does obesity contribute to early deaths, but a **lower quality of life** is also something individuals with excess weight often face.<sup>6</sup>



It is important for us to recognize our own personal biases, whether we realize it or not, towards people living with obesity. **Have you ever noticed your perception of a person change because of their weight?**

We must work together to change the way we think about obesity, so that we can eliminate the burden of weight stigma and discrimination to ensure that those living with obesity receive proper treatment.

### Want to learn more?

For additional information about weight stigma, how it can affect you or someone you care about, and how you can help make a difference:



Visit Obesity Canada



Speak with your healthcare professional



Contact your human resources department



**We want to hear from you!** Email us at [NNCICustomerCare@novonordisk.com](mailto:NNCICustomerCare@novonordisk.com) to share your ideas and comments.

Next time we meet, we will explore the science behind the factors that lead to obesity.

**References:** 1. Obesity Canada. Weight Bias. 2019. Available at: <https://obesitycanada.ca/weight-bias/>. Retrieved July 18, 2019. 2. Obesity Canada. Overcoming Weight Bias—Do you have it in you? 2018. Available at: <http://obesitycanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Overcoming-Weight-Bias-11x17-May-2018-Eng-Fr4.pdf>. Retrieved July 30, 2019. 3. Epstein L, et al. A qualitative study of GPs' views of treating obesity. *Br J Gen Pract.* 2005;55:750–754. 4. Puhl RM, et al. Obesity Stigma: Important Considerations for Public Health. *Am J Public Health.* 2010;100(6):1019–1028. 5. Durrer D, et al. Weight Stigma In Health Care. What are the causes and the consequences? *EASO.* 2018:1–8. 6. Christiansen B, et al. Understanding everyday life of morbidly obese adults: habits and body image. *Int J Qualitative Stud Health Well-being.* 2012;7. 7. Prospective Studies Collaboration. Body-mass index and cause-specific mortality in 900 000 adults: collaborative analyses of 57 prospective studies. *Lancet.* 2009;373(9669):1083–1096. 8. Grover SA, et al. Years of life lost and healthy life-years lost from diabetes and cardiovascular disease in overweight and obese people: a modelling study. *Lancet Diabetes Endocrinol.* 2015;3(2):114–122. 9. Whitlock and Prospective Studies Collaboration. Body-mass index and causespecific mortality in 900 000 adults: collaborative analyses of 57 prospective studies. *The Lancet.* 2009;373:1083–1096. 10. Solutions for Public Health. Obesity and mental health *National Obesity Observatory.* 2011:1–28. 11. Canadian Cancer Society. Excess weight expected to become 2<sup>nd</sup> leading preventable cause of cancer, after tobacco. 2019. Available at: <https://www.cancer.ca/en/about-us/for-media/mediareleases/national2019/compare/?region=on>. Retrieved August 2, 2019. 12. Janssen I. The public health burden of obesity in Canada. *Can J Diabetes.* 2013;37(2):90–96.

