

# Obesity and cancer: What is the link?

## What is overweight and obesity?

Overweight and obesity are terms to describe excess body weight and body fat. Overweight and obesity can be measured by a Body Mass Index (BMI) which is a calculation based on weight in relation to height.

Waist circumference is also important as it tells us how much fat is around our waist and internal organs. The fat around our internal organs, known as 'visceral fat', can be harmful to our health if our bodies have a lot of it.

Being overweight can increase your risk of type 2 diabetes, chronic disease and some cancers.

## Measuring overweight and obesity

Overweight and obesity can be measured by the Body Mass Index (BMI).

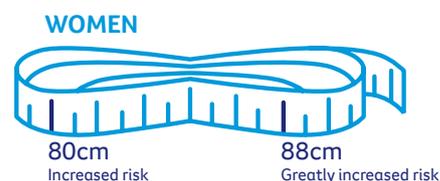
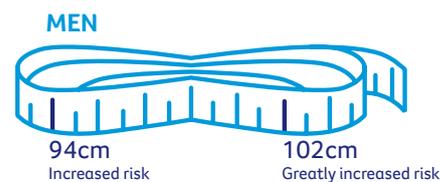


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**WEIGHT [KILOGRAMS]**

**HEIGHT X HEIGHT [METRES]**

<b>Underweight</b>	<18.5	<b>Obese class I</b>	30–35
<b>Normal range</b>	18.5–25	<b>Obese class II</b>	35–40
<b>Overweight</b>	25–30	<b>Obese class III</b>	>40



## What causes overweight/obesity?

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

- consuming more energy (kilojoules from food and drinks) than your body needs
- decreasing the amount of energy (kilojoules from food and drinks) that your body is using (through physical activity).

Other factors can also lead to weight gain, like:

- the genes you inherited from your parents
- your surroundings: food supply, increased food portion size, workplace, sleep, built environment
- stress, low energy, low mood, lack of motivation or emotional eating may cause us to over-consume food and drinks
- how well your body turns food into energy (metabolism).

## What is cancer?

Cancer is a disease of the body's cells. Cells in our body are constantly reproducing and regenerating to keep our bodies functioning. Sometimes, these cell processes become abnormal and can turn into the early stages of cancer. This can sometimes spread through the body.

## What causes cancer?

Cancer can be caused by many uncontrollable factors such as age, genetics and hormonal factors. But we know that one third of cancers are caused by factors that are preventable. These include:

- smoking
- drinking alcohol
- sun exposure
- physical inactivity
- unhealthy diet
- being overweight or obese
- not participating in early cancer screening.

## What is the link between overweight and obesity and cancer?

Research shows that overweight and obesity is a risk factor for 13 types of cancer. Higher body mass index (BMI) and waist circumference can increase your risk.

Excess body fat (especially toxic fat around the waist and vital organs) leads to more chemicals and hormones being released into the body. It may also lead to inflammation.

Having inflammation or an excess of these chemicals and hormones mean that your cells might not divide correctly and they might produce abnormal cells.

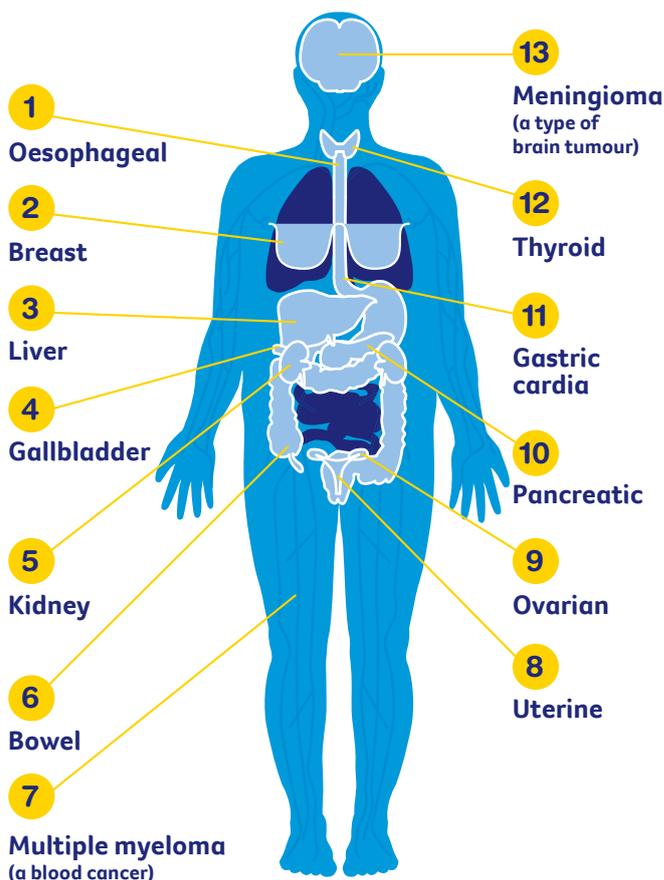
The production of these abnormal cells make cancer more likely to grow.

## What is toxic fat?

Scientists used to think that fat tissue was just our body's way of storing extra energy that we didn't need. It was assumed that fat was just stored under the skin and didn't really do much. Now we know that body fat is also stored deep inside our bodies, including on our organs. This is called visceral fat.

Fat tissue produces chemicals and hormones which travel around our bodies. Visceral fat produces more of these chemicals than the fat under our skin. These chemicals can be damaging to our bodies. That's why we call it toxic fat.

## Obesity increases your risk of 13 cancers.



## What can I do about it?

To achieve and maintain a healthy weight, we recommend you:

- 1 Avoid sugary drinks.
- 2 Limit junk food.
- 3 Eat more vegetables and fruit.
- 4 Be active every day.
- 5 Avoid alcohol.

## What if I am overweight and can't lose weight?

Losing weight can be difficult at times, but the good news is that by eating healthy foods, moving more and preventing more weight gain you can reduce your risk of certain types of cancer and other chronic disease, such as type 2 diabetes and heart disease.

## Where can I get more information?

- Visit [cancervic.org.au/healthyweight](http://cancervic.org.au/healthyweight)
- Visit [LiveLighter.com.au](http://LiveLighter.com.au) for tips on a healthy diet and lifestyle
- Talk to your doctor
- Find a dietitian at [daa.asn.au](http://daa.asn.au)
- Visit [www.eatforhealth.gov.au](http://www.eatforhealth.gov.au)