How the COVID pandemic has impacted issues of obesity

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Obesity increases the risk of severe illness from COVID-19 and other health problems, such as heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure and certain cancers.

"One of the most prevalent conditions in this country and around the world is increased weight and obesity," says Dr. Donald Hensrud, director of the Mayo Clinic Healthy Living Program. "Approximately 70% of Americans are either overweight or have obesity. This is not easy. There are hundreds of things that influence what we eat, our physical activity and our weight."The definition of overweight is having a body mass index (BMI) between 25 and 29.9. A BMI of 30 or greater is classified as obese.

"During COVID-19, we've taken things to another level. Weight, for example, is something that many people struggle with. During the pandemic, fitness centers have been shut down, our activity may be decreasing, we may be working from home and not moving as much," says Dr. Hensrud. "In addition, our diet has changed. We may be eating more comfort food or eating what's around rather than

getting something that is healthier."

Dr. Hensrud recommends trying to get some activity every day. It can be as simple as taking a walk. For those working at home, Dr. Hensrud recommends taking a break every 30 minutes to move.

Making small changes can make a big difference. Dr. Hensrud says following a healthy diet as outlined by the Dietary Guidelines for Americans can help people to manage their weight and improve their health in the process.

The core elements for a healthy diet pattern include plenty of nutrient-dense foods which have little added sugars, saturated fat and sodium.

- Vegetables of all types—dark green; red and orange; beans, peas, and lentils; starchy; and other vegetables
- Fruits, especially whole fruit
- Grains, at least half of which are whole grain
- Dairy, including fat-free or low-fat milk, yogurt, and cheese, and/or lactose-free versions and fortified soy beverages and yogurt as alternatives
- Protein foods, including lean meats, poultry, and eggs; seafood; beans, peas, and lentils; and nuts, seeds, and soy products
- Oils, including vegetable oils and oils in food, such as seafood and nuts
- Skip fad diets

"This time of year, many people are looking to lose weight, and they have new year's resolutions. Oftentimes, people will go on a diet that may be not sustainable over time. People can lose weight if they only eat 500 calories from jellybeans, but that isn't sustainable or healthy, obviously, by following the dietary guidelines can help people eat a pattern of eating that is practical, enjoyable, sustainable, and can help them manage their weight."

Establishing healthy eating habits takes time and patience. Dr. Hensrud says, "On a practical basis, I can't emphasize enough that eating a healthy [diet](#) does not have to be drudgery. It should be enjoyable. There's a lot of great food out there. It should be practical. We don't have to spend hours in the kitchen."

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