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Obesity is ever on the increase, and has been recognised as a serious health problem since the 19th-century. Today we are even more aware of the physical, psychological and social effects of obesity, and can create an 'alphabet of obesity,' spelling out the toll that obesity takes on the body.

Obesity, an early warning

[William Banting](#) [5], a 19th-century undertaker, was one of the first people to recognise that obesity was damaging to health, shocking the nation when he famously declared, "Of all that affects humanity I do not know of nor can I imagine any more distressing condition than that of obesity".

Subsequently, at a meeting of the Association of Life Insurance Medical Directors of America in 1901, data was presented that showed, for the first time, a statistical link between being overweight and poor health.

Writing in the [New England Journal of Medicine in 1953](#) [6], Dr David Barr begins to describe some of the health risks associated with obesity, stating that "A mere list of its hazards, disabilities and discomforts is formidable."

Today, the country's leading doctor, Dame Sally Davies, has stated that the current obesity epidemic is so serious that it should be treated as a 'national risk' alongside terrorism.

The alphabet of obesity

A list of health problems and difficulties associated with obesity from A–Z

A

- Atherosclerosis (hardening of the arteries)

- [Asthma](#) [7]

B [7]

- [Breast cancer](#) [8]

C

- **Coronary heart disease**
- [Colon cancer](#) [8]

D

- [Depression](#) [9]—"Obese persons have a 55% increased risk of developing depression over time, whereas depressed persons have a 58% increased risk of becoming obese" according to Dr Frans Zitman of Leiden University.

E

- **Esteem issues**

F

- **Fertility**—In her report, [Dame Sally Davies states "obese women have lower fertility rates"](#) [10]

G

- **Gallstones**
- **Gout**

H

- **Heart disease**
- [High blood pressure](#) [11]—According to the World Heart Federation, 21% of heart disease is due to increased weight

I

- **Isolation**—Studies show that obese children are more stigmatised, isolated, and disconnected from social networks than their normal-weight peers.

J

- **Joint disease**—such as osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis

K

- [Kidney disease](#) [8]

L

- Low confidence

M

- **Metabolic syndrome** (a combination of increased blood pressure, blood sugar and cholesterol)
- **Miscarriage**—Dame Sally Davies states “obese women have greater risks of miscarriage”

N

- **Nerve damage**—such as carpal tunnel syndrome

O

- **Obesity in children**—Dame Sally Davies also states that obesity in pregnancy can increase the risk of the developing child becoming obese.

P

- **Prostate cancer**—Analysis of data from the SELECT trial in Seattle showed that obesity increased prostate cancer risk in some men.

Q

- **Quality of life** – including pain, physical ability, social and psychological factors

R

- [Reflux](#) [12]

S

- **Stroke**—One study shows [obesity to be linked to a 34 per cent](#) [13] higher risk of stroke in men and 7 percent higher risk in women

T

- **Type 2 diabetes**—According to the World Heart Federation, 58% of diabetes is attributable to increased weight.

U

- [Uterine cancer](#) [8]

V

- **Varicose veins**—due to added pressure on the veins.

W

- Wound healing impaired

X

- Xanthomas—fatty lumps under the skin due to high cholesterol. [Cholesterol levels](#) [14] are often raised in obesity.

Y

- Yo-yo dieting (weight cycling)

Z

- [Zzzz....sleeplessness/sleepiness, snoring](#) [15]

The good news is that losing even a small amount of weight, 5%, can reduce many of the serious risks of obesity.

While some cases have a genetic or medical cause, generally [dieting](#) [16] and exercise can help, especially if combined with [cognitive behavioural therapy](#) [17].

The Health Secretary is even considering introducing a 'sugar tax' to fight obesity. With 600 million obese adults worldwide, tackling obesity has become a global priority.



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