



# The Consequences of Obesity

Pam White  
Health Net

## *Heart attack*

Obesity can promote high blood pressure and is a serious risk factor for developing a heart attack. Heart attacks occur when blood flow in a coronary artery is interrupted. Damage or death of part of the heart muscle may result. The damaged portion of the heart muscle appears as a bloodless, discolored area. Many heart attack victims die before reaching the hospital.

## *Gallstones*

Obesity is a major risk factor for developing gallstones, especially in women. Gallstones form when bile (a fluid that is used to help the body digest fats) hardens into a stone-like material. Because gallstones can cause serious or even fatal obstructions or infection, removal of the gallbladder and gallstones is often necessary.

## *Joint problems*

Obesity places increased weight on hip, knee and lower back joints and is a major cause of arthritis in these joints. The onset of pain is often gradual, and treatment may involve weight reduction, avoidance of unnecessary strain, or even surgical replacement of the joint. Gout – a form of arthritis that can cause severe pain – is also associated with obesity.



## *Sleep apnea*

Obesity increases the risk for developing sleep apnea, a potentially serious condition that causes individuals to stop breathing for short periods during sleep. Excess weight around the neck can narrow the throat's airway and interrupt breathing. Loud snoring, excessive daytime sleepiness, and even heart failure may result. Weight loss often improves the condition.

## *Cancer*

Obesity is associated with an increased risk for developing certain types of cancer. Obese women are at greater risk for developing cancer of the cervix, ovary, uterus, breast, gallbladder and colon. Obese men are at risk for developing cancer of the prostate, colon and rectum. The link between obesity and cancer remains under investigation and may vary with different types of cancer.

*(continued)*

Source: 2002 Health Edco® This information highlights only a few of the many conditions associated with obesity.

CORP84420 (8/11) In Arizona, Health Net of Arizona, Inc. underwrites benefits for HMO plans, and Health Net Life Insurance Company underwrites benefits for indemnity plans and life insurance coverage. Health Net of Arizona, Inc., Health Net of California, Inc., Health Net Health Plan of Oregon, Inc. and Health Net Life Insurance Company are subsidiaries of Health Net, Inc. Health Net is a registered service mark of Health Net, Inc. All rights reserved.

### *Artery damage*

Obesity increases the risk for artery damage. Atherosclerosis occurs when plaque – yellowish deposits of cholesterol and fat – builds up on artery walls. This causes arteries to narrow and harden, which decreases their ability to regulate blood flow and contributes to high blood pressure. Artery damage can begin in childhood and is a major cause of heart disease, heart attack, and stroke.

### *Diabetes*

Obese individuals are at increased risk for developing diabetes, a common but dangerous condition. Excess fat can make the body resistant to insulin, a hormone produced by the pancreas that helps regulate blood sugar levels. Often undiagnosed, diabetes is a leading cause of early death.

### *Stroke*

Strokes are a leading cause of disability and death. A stroke occurs when blood flow to part of the brain stops because of a clogged or ruptured artery in the brain. Obesity increases the possibility of having a stroke due to its association with artery damage, high blood pressure, and clotting abnormalities.