



World Obesity Federation confirms “Obesity Is a Chronic Disease”

In a statement published today in the leading journal *Obesity Reviews*, the World Obesity Federation confirms its support for defining obesity as a chronic, relapsing disease. The statement was prepared by a scientific committee of the Federation which concluded that obesity fits the epidemiological model of a disease process except that the toxic or pathological agent is diet-related rather than a microbe.

The question of whether obesity should be called a ‘disease’ has sparked controversy for most of the last century. In their *Obesity Reviews* position statement, Dr George Bray and his colleagues examine how an abundance of food, low physical activity, and several other environmental factors interact with genetic susceptibility. They draw parallels to chronic diseases, noting that the magnitude of obesity and its adverse effects in individuals may relate to the virulence or toxicity of the environment and its interaction with the host.

“Accepting the concept that obesity is a chronic disease process is important for several reasons,” said Dr. Bray. “First, it removes the feeling that patients alone are responsible for their excess weight. It also focuses attention on the ways in which this disease process can be tackled. And finally, it shows that if we can successfully treat obesity, many of its associated diseases will be eliminated.”

In an accompanying letter to the editor, the Federation’s policy experts suggest that declaring obesity to be a disease could benefit those people who are suffering with obesity and wish to have access to medical advice and support, “whilst also strengthening the call for dealing with the social determinants, obesogenic environments and systemic causes of individual weight gain.” They note that obesity is a normal response to an obesogenic environment, but is not in itself a biologically normal or healthy condition. They also note that recognizing obesity as a disease may reduce individuals’ internalized stigma,

change the public discourse about blame for the condition, and have benefits in countries where health service costs are funded from insurance schemes that limit payments for non-disease conditions or risk factors. **Obesity: a chronic relapsing progressive disease process. A position statement of the World Obesity Federation.**

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Comment: obesity is a disease – some implications for the World Obesity Federation’s advocacy and public health activities.

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Notes

The World Obesity Federation is an alliance of over 50 national and regional organisations dedicated to research into obesity, and treatment and prevention of the disease. It promotes better understanding of the problems faced by people with high levels of adiposity and urges stronger government action to reduce the obesogenicity of the modern environment. The Federation is a charity based in the UK, and is the host of World Obesity Day on October 11th each year. www.worldobesity.org

Note to picture editors

Please use fair, non-stigmatizing images of people with obesity such as those in our free Image Bank: <http://imagebank.worldobesity.org>

Other free-to-use libraries of positive images of people with obesity are available at several sites. See the list at: <http://easo.org/media-portal/obesity-image-bank>