



# **Triage Guidelines for Obesity and Weight-related Concerns- Making the Appropriate Referral**

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Center for Healthy Weight and Nutrition | Endocrinology | Cardiology

# Understanding Childhood and Adolescent Obesity Management

## Definition, Causes, and Risk

Obesity is a common, complex, and often persistent chronic condition associated with serious health and social consequences. Childhood obesity results from a multifactorial set of socioecological, environmental, and genetic influences that affect children and families.

Body Mass Index (BMI) is the most clinically appropriate tool to screen for excess adiposity and clinically identify children with overweight and obesity. Overweight is defined as BMI between the 85th and 94th percentiles for age and sex. Obesity is typically defined as having a BMI of  $\geq 95$ th percentile for age and sex. Severe obesity is defined as BMI  $\geq 120\%$  of the 95th percentile for age and sex.

## Bias and Stigma

Providers and care givers should avoid blame or using shaming language when addressing weight concerns with patients and families. The reasons for obesity are complex and should not be attributed to lack of will power or solely personal responsibility. Weight-related bias and stigma often lead to suboptimal patient-clinician relationships and poorer treatment outcomes.

It is best to use positive and affirming language in discussing weight-related concerns. Using first person language in notes and conversations allows for addressing obesity as a condition, not a stigma (e.g., Kayla has obesity and NOT “Kayla is obese”; children with obesity and NOT “obese children”).

## Referral Options for Children and Adolescents with Obesity

Obesity is a chronic condition and should be treated with intensive and long-term care strategies, ongoing medical monitoring, treatment of associated co-morbidities and ongoing access to obesity treatment. Nationwide Children’s Hospital offers a range of specialty services to address obesity and weight-related health concerns. Please use the following guide to determine which referral is appropriate for your patient.

## The Center for Healthy Weight and Nutrition

The Center for Healthy Weight and Nutrition is a comprehensive tertiary care obesity center which offers programs for both the prevention and treatment of obesity for children (2 years of age or older) and adolescents, with BMI at or above the 95th percentile.

We recommend **REFERRING** to the **Center for Healthy Weight and Nutrition** if a patient has:

BMI  $>95$ th percentile for age and sex and one of the following:

- a. Acanthosis nigricans
- b. HbA1c  $<6.5\%$
- c. Fasting glucose  $<126$  mg/dL
- d. Random glucose  $<200$  mg/dL
- e. OGTT 2-hour glucose  $<200$  mg/dL
- f. Total cholesterol less than 250 mg/dL
- g. LDL less than 160 mg/dL
- h. Triglycerides less than 500 mg/dL
- i. Picky eating or disordered eating (NOT Eating Disorders)
- j. Low risk of Cushing syndrome, hypothyroidism or growth hormone deficiency (consistent height percentile in a child with excessive weight gain makes an underlying endocrine disorder unlikely)
- k. Weight gain related to use of antipsychotic medications
- l. Interest in bariatric surgery

### What treatment options does the Center for Healthy Weight and Nutrition offer?

- The Center provides intensive healthy lifestyle intervention, Physical activity-only sessions, Nutrition only sessions, Psychology counseling sessions in selected cases, health coaching sessions in selected cases, use of specialized diets/inpatient hospitalization e.g., protein sparing modified fast, pharmacotherapy (including Metformin, Topiramate, Phentermine, GLP-1 agonists like Semaglutide and Liraglutide), and Bariatric Surgery.
- The treatment plan is driven by shared decision making between the patient, family, and the Center team.
- Typical visits are often scheduled every 4-6 weeks, or more often depending on patient need and treatment plan.
- The Center team is interdisciplinary and includes Physicians, Surgeon, Nurse Practitioners, Psychologists, Dietitians, Physical Therapists, Athletic Trainers and Social Worker.
- If BMI is 85- <95th percentile, most children can be managed in their primary care practice. However, if a referral to the Center is desired for a specific reason, the clinician is advised to EITHER (1) reach out to HWN team for a curbside consult before sending the referral or (2) indicate reason(s) in referral note for a Center evaluation.

For more information: [NationwideChildrens.org/specialties/center-for-healthy-weight-and-nutrition](https://www.nationwidechildrens.org/specialties/center-for-healthy-weight-and-nutrition)

### Endocrinology

The division of Endocrinology at Nationwide Children's Hospital diagnoses and treats a wide range of hormone disorders including diabetes mellitus. Most children with obesity who are growing well (do not have short stature or slow growth for age), do not have an underlying endocrine disorder as a cause of their obesity. Hence screening for an endocrine etiology of obesity should only be done if there are other signs indicative of a hormonal dysfunction (e.g. poor growth). Children and adolescents with obesity who do not have clinical features indicative of an endocrine etiology for their obesity should be referred to Center for Healthy Weight and Nutrition as they are best suited to meet the needs of these children.

When caring for a child with obesity, we recommend **REFERRING** to **Endocrinology** if a patient has:

- a. Excessive weight gain in a child with suspected or known endocrine diagnoses (like hypothyroidism, growth hormone deficiency etc) or a diagnosis of diabetes mellitus
- b. HbA1c 6.5% or higher
- c. Fasting glucose 126 mg/dL or higher
- d. Random glucose 200 mg/dL or higher
- e. OGTT 2-hour glucose 200 mg/dL or higher
- f. Evaluation primarily for concern for polycystic ovarian syndrome

\*For early onset obesity, referral can be made to either the Center for Healthy Weight and Nutrition or Endocrinology.

For more information: [NationwideChildrens.org/specialties/endocrinology](https://www.nationwidechildrens.org/specialties/endocrinology)

## Preventive Cardiology

The Preventive Cardiology Program at Nationwide Children's Hospital is a multidisciplinary program which focuses on diagnosing and managing conditions that increase future cardiovascular risk such as inherited and acquired lipid disorders and elevated blood pressure. Specialty trained preventive cardiologists work with dietitians, exercise physiologists, and other specialties to make the patient's care path as comprehensive as possible.

We recommend **REFERRING** to **Preventive Cardiology** if a patient has:

- a. Total cholesterol 250 mg/dL or higher
- b. LDL 160 mg/dL or higher
- c. Triglycerides 500 mg/dL or higher
- d. Fasting triglyceride > 200 mg/dL with normal weight (BMI < 85%)

\*Several of these patients may also need to be referred to the Center for Healthy Weight and Nutrition for a comprehensive management.

For more information: [NationwideChildrens.org/specialties/heart-center-cardiology/services-we-offer/programs/preventative-cardiology-clinic](https://NationwideChildrens.org/specialties/heart-center-cardiology/services-we-offer/programs/preventative-cardiology-clinic)

## Considerations for Streamlining and Coordination of Care

- Based on these criteria, a referral to both Center for Healthy Weight and Nutrition and Endocrinology for weight related concerns *at the same time is often not necessary* or cost-effective.
- The Center for Healthy Weight and Nutrition, Endocrinology and Cardiology services have an evidence-based collaborative protocol to help streamline care. Thus in a few instances where the referral does not meet the criteria listed above, a referral to cardiology or endocrinology may be redirected to the Center for Healthy Weight and Nutrition or vice versa.
- In those instances, you will *receive documentation informing you ahead of this adjustment to the referral*. The Center for Healthy Weight and Nutrition staff will start the visit by explaining their role and reason for adjustment to the family. Based on our experience, most families are often comfortable with the change.
- Please make sure your patients are aware this may happen in some instances. If you are insistent on a particular referral e.g., Cardiology or Endocrinology, please note it on the referral form.

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## Referrals and Consultations

Online: [NationwideChildrens.org](https://NationwideChildrens.org)

Phone: (614) 722-6200 or (877) 722-6220 | Fax: (614) 722-4000

Physician Direct Connect Line for 24-hour urgent physician consultations:  
(614) 355-0221 or (877) 355-0221.



## Laboratory Testing and Pathology Consultations

Online: [NationwideChildrens.org/Lab](https://NationwideChildrens.org/Lab)

Phone: (614) 722-5477 or (800) 934-7575