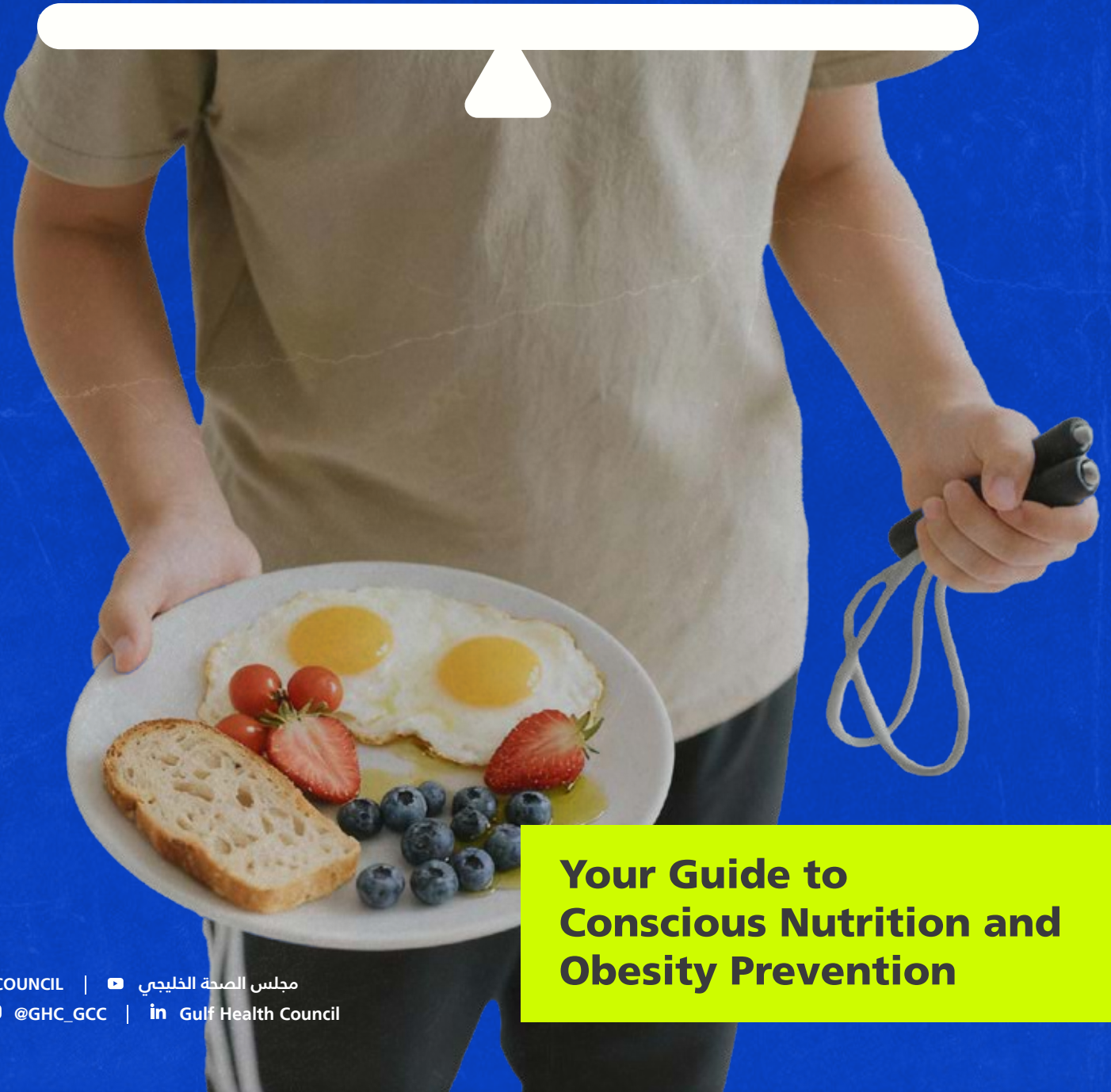


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Gulf Health Council



Balance It

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**Your Guide to
Conscious Nutrition and
Obesity Prevention**

Guide Themes:

**Awareness is the Beginning...
and Health is the Goal**
Obesity

Causes Open Doors

Causes of Obesity
The Cycle of Your Child's Exposure to Obesity -
Obesity Risk Circle

**Obesity and Appearance in the
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Awareness is the Beginning... and Health is the Goal

Obesity

Obesity is the abnormal or excessive accumulation of fat in the body, leading to an increased likelihood of exposure to serious health problems.

According to the World Health Organization data, global obesity rates have seen a remarkable rise from **1990 to 2022**, almost doubling among adults from **7% to 16%**, while increasing fourfold among children and adolescents from **2% to 8%**. In **2022**, over **390 million** children and adolescents aged between **5 and 19 years** were recorded as overweight, with approximately 160 million suffering from obesity.

Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries are part of this increasing global trend, recording obesity rates above the global average.



Your Body Speaks to You... Do You Hear Its Warnings?

Obesity can reflect on you with symptoms, including:



Physical, such as:

- Abnormal increase in body mass, predominantly fat, especially in the abdominal, thigh, neck, and shoulder areas.
- Shortness of breath upon exertion due to fat accumulation around the lungs and chest.
- Excessive sweating, quick fatigue, and difficulty moving due to increased body mass.
- Joint pain (especially in the knees and back) because of increased body mass.



Psychological and Behavioral, such as:

- Low self-confidence and self-esteem due to societal views and bullying.
- Depression or anxiety due to societal withdrawal.
- Eating disorders of various kinds in response to emotions, not out of hunger or fullness.
- Poor academic performance.



Complications or Health Diseases:

- Heart diseases, vascular issues, and high blood pressure due to fat accumulation around the heart and organs, in addition to increased levels of triglycerides and bad cholesterol in the blood.
- Type 2 diabetes due to insulin resistance and pancreatic inefficiency linked to fat accumulation and metabolic overactivity.
- Hormonal disorders and ovarian cysts in females.
- Liver issues such as fatty liver and gallbladder problems.
- Joint inflammation.

An increase in numerical weight does not always signify obesity, but obesity does indicate fat build-up reaching unhealthy levels, and childhood obesity is not merely a temporary state; it may carry into adulthood without early intervention, thereby increasing the risk of chronic diseases.



Obesity Measurement Tools

Divided into those specific to children and adolescents



Physical:

- **Body Mass Index Equation** (Weight kg / Height m²), but for children and adolescents, there are growth charts measuring height and weight percentiles as well as waist and head circumference.
- **DXA Scan device.**
- **Bioelectrical impedance measurement device** - the most common in clinics, sports clubs, and health facilities.

Non-physical (Biochemical Tests):

These are not direct measures of obesity but are used to estimate its health effects, such as blood sugar analysis, blood lipids (especially triglycerides and bad cholesterol), liver enzymes, and insulin resistance.

Causes Open Doors

Causes of Obesity in Children and Adolescents

Lack of awareness of obesity causes, makes it seem like a lack of willpower, but it runs deeper... Obesity in children and adolescents is a complex health issue, not just rampant eating.

Direct Causes

Genetic: Genes can increase the risk of obesity.

Mother's nutrition during pregnancy: Poor nutrition or gestational diabetes increases the likelihood of obesity.

Child's beginning of life: Breastfeeding protects against obesity, while early introduction of food within the first 6 months can increase the risk of obesity.

Adolescence: Prevalence of fast foods + peer influence + eating out.

Indirect Causes

Social and Economic: Limited access to healthy foods and sports centers.

Lack of physical activity: Absence of play opportunities and dependency on cars.

Environmental Factors: In environments lacking healthy nutrition and physical activity.

Family (Psychological Aspect): Pressure to eat or use food as a reward, combined with stress and anxiety, increases the risk of obesity in children.

Global Standards

Physical Activity Recommendations:

Children aged 5-17 years: 60 minutes daily of moderate to high-intensity physical activity.

Adults aged 18-64 years: 150 minutes per week of moderate-intensity physical activity or 75 minutes of high-intensity physical activity, or an equivalent combination of both.

Older adults:

Same recommendations as adults (150 minutes weekly).

Reality in the Gulf:

• **Adult males:** Only 39-42% meet the recommended level.

• **Adult females:** Only 26-28% meet it.

Obesity is not a lack of will but the result of complex factors that can be prevented through awareness, movement, and healthy nutrition.



The Cycle of Your Child's Exposure to Obesity

Obesity Risk Circle



1. Healthy Child:

- Electronic games.
- Fast food.
- No physical activity.

2. Child with Mild Obesity:

- Physical inactivity.
- Laziness from climbing stairs.

3. Child with Moderate Obesity:

Sports and physical activity become difficult and uncomfortable.

4. Child with Severe Obesity:

- Risk of diabetes.
- Asthma.
- Exposure to other obesity-related diseases.
- This makes exercise difficult and increases the risk of depression and low self-esteem.

5. Obese Adult:

- Heart diseases.
- Diabetes.
- Respiratory diseases.
- Large expenses on hospitals.
- Increased risk of death.

Change begins when we understand
that obesity is not the end of the
journey, **but the beginning of a new
journey towards better health and a
more active life**

Global studies indicate that **those
who spend more time in front of
screens** are 27% more likely to be
obese compared to those who
spend less time.

Prevention Starts with Your Awareness Before Your Habits

Obesity Prevention

• At the Individual Level •

Awareness of balanced eating habits

Regular physical activity

Enhance daily healthy behaviors

• At the Family Level •

Involve the family in modifying diet and physical activity

Reducing screen time decreases children's body mass index (weight-to-height ratio)

Family joint meals (at least 3 times a week)

A supportive family environment for healthy nutrition and activity

• At the Institutional Level •

Providing facilities for physical activity and encouraging access to them.

Limiting advertising of high sugar and fat foods.

Regulate digital content aimed at children.

Encourage companies to market healthy alternatives (fruits, vegetables, whole grains, healthy dairy).

Control school sales and prohibit fizzy drinks and nutritionally poor meals.

A healthy lifestyle prevents **80%** of chronic diseases and premature death through not smoking, physical activity, and adhering to a healthy diet.

Lack of sleep increases obesity

Studies have proven that screens delay sleep by reducing the release of sleep-inducing hormones, affecting their quality and disrupting hunger and satiety hormones, increasing the feeling of hunger and the desire to consume high-calorie foods, thus raising obesity risk.

It is recommended for children to sleep 9-14 hours daily and adolescents 7-9 hours, alongside practicing 60 minutes daily of moderate to high-intensity activity like running, swimming, and cycling, with 3 days a week dedicated to muscle and bone strengthening activities such as resistance exercises.

Obesity and Appearance in the Eyes of Myths

Misconceptions about Obesity and Appearance

✗ Myth Lack of willpower or laziness alone leads to obesity.	✓ Reality Obesity is a multifactorial disorder (direct and indirect, including genes, hormones, environment, behaviors).
✗ Myth Strict diets are the best treatment for obesity.	✓ Reality Strict diets might cause eating disorders and distort a person's view of food, increasing stress, and may result in nutrient deficiencies or later weight gain.
✗ Myth Obesity is inevitable due to heredity.	✓ Reality Genes contribute to obesity susceptibility, but prevention and healthy behaviors reduce risks.
✗ Myth BMI is reliable for diagnosing obesity	✓ Reality BMI is a quick, simple check that does not differentiate between muscle and fat and is influenced by age, sex, and physiological changes.
✗ Myth Natural weight will return automatically with growth	✓ Reality Without prevention and behavior change, weight loss is unlikely to occur naturally.
✗ Myth Overeating is the sole cause of obesity.	✓ Reality Overeating may be driven by psychological, environmental, or health reasons, representing only part of the problem.
✗ Myth A healthy body shape can be achieved with willpower alone	✓ Reality Genetic and hormonal factors dictate body shape and fat distribution, not willpower alone.



Food is not just about calorie count, but also the type of nutritional content

Nutrient-rich foods like vegetables, proteins, and whole grains provide the body with the necessities for growth and immunity, whereas impoverished foods may fill the stomach and provide energy without nutritional benefits, increasing weight gain susceptibility.



When Food Becomes a Source of Pain

Eating disorders

They are serious mental conditions impacting one's eating habits, whether through food restriction, excessive eating, or compensatory behaviors like forced vomiting or the use of laxatives. Most common types include:

- 1** Anorexia Nervosa
- 2** Bulimia Nervosa
- 3** Binge Eating Disorder



From Subtle Signs to Apparent Indicators

General Symptoms of Eating Disorders

Eating disorders are not limited to behavioral aspects but are associated with biological, psychological, and social factors, significantly affecting an individual's physical and mental health.

Behavioral Symptoms:

Excessive preoccupation with food, calories, weight, and diet.

Avoidance of certain foods or viewing food as "good" or "bad".

Over-exercising (sometimes compulsively).

Secret eating.

Avoiding meals with others or inventing excuses to not eat.

Using the bathroom immediately after eating (potential sign of forced vomiting).

Significant appetite fluctuations (binge or restriction episodes).

Use of laxatives, diuretics, or weight loss pills.



From Subtle Signs to Apparent Indicators

Physical Symptoms (vary by disorder):

- Unexplained weight loss or gain
- Hair loss or thinning
- Dry skin, brittle nails
- Constant feeling of cold
- Menstrual irregularities or cessation
- Dizziness or fainting
- Weak muscles, chronic fatigue
- Swollen cheeks due to frequent vomiting (BED)
- Marks on hands (scars or abrasions from deliberate vomiting)

Psychological and Emotional Symptoms:

- Distorted negative body image
- Extreme fear of weight gain despite thinness
- Feelings of guilt or shame after eating
- Mood swings, depression, anxiety
- Low self-esteem linked to weight or shape
- Feeling out of control during eating (especially in binge eating)

Harsh diets are not a pathway to fitness, but an entry point to danger and suffering

Strict regimes can cause eating disorders, nutrient deficiencies, and distort the view of food and self in children and adolescents.

28% of adolescents in the Arab world have poor knowledge of nutrition, with 60% of their parents lacking the right nutritional awareness.



From Daily Habits to Behavioral Disorders

The causes of eating

are diverse and can be
classified into the following:

Psychological Factors

- Low self-esteem
- Excessive perfectionism
- Accompanying anxiety disorders and obsessive-compulsive disorder

Social and Cultural Factors

- Societal pressure on thinness as a standard of beauty and the ideal body
- Influenced by social media and celebrities

Biological and Genetic

- Family history of psychological disorders
- Imbalances in brain chemicals like serotonin and depression

Behavioral and Personal Factors

- Traumatic childhood experiences
- Bullying related to weight or appearance

At-risk groups for eating disorders can affect anyone, regardless of age or gender. They are not confined to a specific demographic and can appear in children, adolescents, or even adults. However, certain people are more prone to these disorders, **such as:**

- Women and adolescent girls, especially during puberty or early adolescence.
- Athletes, especially those in weight-dependent sports like ballet and gymnastics.
- Individuals suffering from other psychological disorders, such as depression or obsessive-compulsive disorder.

A Common Illusion... and Awareness Saves You

 You must abstain from entire food groups	 Severe restriction causes appetite disorders. There are beneficial fats and complex sugars with fibers and vitamins and minerals, better than harmful fats and simple sugars.
 The more you cut calories, the higher the rate of healthy weight loss	 Harsh diets slow down metabolism, leading to muscle mass loss and increasing weight regain chances.
 Short-term diets are effective for body change.	 Many who follow strict diets regain weight later, with some gaining additional weight.
 Strict diets are the best quick way to lose weight	 These diets cause fluid and muscle loss, not fat, and often result in weight regain.
 Losing weight means giving up all you love	 You can enjoy your favorite foods in small amounts within a balanced diet and physical activity.
 Fat-free foods are always better	 Many contain added sugars worse than healthy fats.
 Supplements substitute for a balanced diet.	 They don't replace varied nutrition and should only be used when necessary under medical guidance.
 Gluten-free foods are healthy for everyone.	 Useful only for those with celiac disease or sensitivity, and unnecessary avoidance leads to fiber and vitamin deprivation.
 Unrefined sugar is much better than white sugar.	 All added sugars behave similarly in the body, with minimal differences, not reducing excess sugar harm.

Mindful eating protects more than you imagine

When a child learns to listen to their hunger and fullness, eating consciously and calmly, it reduces emotional eating and strengthens a healthy relationship with food.



From Awareness to Treatment

Methods of Treating Obesity and Eating Disorders

Obesity:

1. Following a healthy lifestyle, including a balanced, nutritious diet and continuous physical activity.

2. Correcting false concepts about eating habits and improper physical behaviors.

3. Medical intervention, such as medication and surgery under expert supervision.

Treating eating disorders requires a multidisciplinary approach involving psychiatric care, therapeutic nutrition, and psychological and social support. Key adopted methods include:

1. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)

- The first line in treating bulimia nervosa and binge eating disorder.
- Aims to modify thoughts and behaviors linked to food and body.

2. Nutritional Support

- Involves creating a therapeutic nutrition plan under the supervision of a clinical nutrition specialist.
- Addressing accompanying medical complications such as malnutrition or electrolyte imbalance disorder.

3. Medications:

- Antidepressants.

4. Hospital or Specialized Center:

- Antidepressants

Have you ever wondered why some foods seem healthy, and others do not?

Food is not just a flavor or a scent; it is a daily message to your body and mind

Over the guide pages, discover the difference between safe and balanced food to transform your meals into a conscious step towards a life full of health and activity



"Safety First, Balance Always"

Balanced Food



A diet containing all essential elements (carbohydrates, proteins, fats, vitamins, minerals, water) in appropriate proportions, supporting growth, immunity, and body function efficiency.

Safe Food

Food that is prepared, stored, and consumed in ways that prevent contamination (biological, chemical, physical) and reduce the risk of foodborne illnesses.

The Difference Between Them

Balanced food meets the body's nutritional and health needs.

Safe food prevents poisoning and illnesses through proper handling and storage.

Integration: Food isn't healthy if it's unsafe, nor safe if it's unbalanced.

Steps to Help You and Your Children Make Better Nutritional Choices

Strategies to Enhance Healthy Food

There are several strategies that help in making healthy food choices, including:

Nutritional Labels:

Reading calorie and ingredient cards (fats, sugars, proteins, fiber, salt) to compare products.

Calorie Display in Restaurants:

Helps choose meals lower in calories and harmful fats.

Regulating Marketing to Children:

Reducing advertisements promoting unhealthy foods (like fast foods and sweets).

Nutritional Education Campaigns:

In schools and educational settings to boost nutritional awareness.

Family Participation:

Advanced meal planning and purchasing healthy ingredients (vegetables, fruits, legumes).
Involving children in food preparation increases their love for nutritious foods.

5 Tips for a Healthy Routine for Children and Adolescents

1

Sufficient daily sleep

2

Encouraging healthy eating habits

3

Reducing screen time

4

Encouraging regular physical activity

5

Reducing saturated fats, added sugars, and salt



Your choice at the supermarket is your first line of defense for your health

Reading labels and using color cues helps you make better, easier nutritional decisions without needing to know fine details.

Get Started Here

Learn the Most Important Nutrition Terms:

Nutrient-Dense Foods (High Nutritional Density Foods)

Foods rich in vitamins, minerals, fiber, and beneficial plant compounds with **relatively low calories**, added sugars, and harmful fats (saturated and trans). **Examples:** vegetables, fruits, high-value proteins (meats, poultry, fish and seafood, eggs, dairy products), legumes, nuts, and complex sugars (whole grains and products).

Calories

A unit of measure for energy that the body obtains from food and drink, necessary for vital body functions like breathing, digestion, movement, and temperature regulation. **Calories are the amount of energy produced by macronutrients (carbohydrates, fats, proteins).**

Carbohydrates (Sugars)

The primary energy source for the body, particularly for the brain and muscles. **Carbs convert into glucose used directly or stored in the liver and muscles.** They produce 4 calories per 1 gram and are found in bread, rice, fruits, potatoes, and grains. The body needs complex sugars that are digested and absorbed slowly, more than simple sugars that are digested and absorbed quickly.

Get Started Here

Learn the Most Important Nutrition Terms:

Fats

The most concentrated energy sources. They serve as an energy source during rest or prolonged physical activity. They produce 9 calories per gram and are found in oils, nuts, butter, and avocado. **The body needs healthy fats (unsaturated) in moderate amounts,** while saturated and trans fats should be reduced.

Proteins

Less relied upon for energy production. Their primary function is building and repairing, though they're also used as an energy source when carbs and fats are deficient. They produce 4 calories per 1 gram and are found in meat, eggs, legumes, and dairy products.

Vitamins, Minerals, and Water

Don't supply energy to the body, but are essential for energy reactions within the body.

Empty Calories (Nutritionally Devoid Foods)

Foods rich in calories from simple, rapidly absorbed added sugars (e.g., sodas, processed juices, candy, cakes) and solid saturated fats (e.g., fried foods, chips, butter, margarine), but lack vitamins, minerals, and fibers necessary for the body's health. **Excessive consumption increases the risk of weight gain and obesity complications.**

Daily consumption of energy drinks and sweetened sodas increases the risk of heart and diabetes problems by more than 25%.

The availability and abundance of unhealthy foods around you don't mean they are the healthy choice for your health!

Choices are around, and with your right decision, you can choose



Your choice at the supermarket is your first line of defense for your health

Reading labels helps you distinguish between healthy and misleading foods

Nutritional Claims

Any statement that indicates the product contains a higher or lower level of a nutritional component, e.g., **"low-fat"**.

Health Claims

A statement linking food or one of its components to a health benefit or disease prevention, e.g., **"calcium strengthens bones"**.

Some of these claims can be false, so stay aware

Phrases on the label aren't always the truth

- Many products use enticing phrases like "healthy", "fat-burning", "boosts immunity" without scientific evidence.
- Reliable claims must be certified by official bodies.
- Avoid being a marketing victim. Learn to verify information credibility.

Balance It

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**Change doesn't start with big steps
but with a simple decision to balance
every choice.**

**Your food, sleep, movement, and even your
view of yourself all make a difference.**

