



ACTIVATE
2023 | NATIONAL WELLNESS CONFERENCE

THE “BIGGEST LOSER” MAY BE YOUR EMPLOYEES

Rethinking How We Address Weight in the Workplace

Cassie Christopher, MS, RDN

OBJECTIVES

1. Understand the benefits and drawbacks of “Biggest Loser” programs and addressing weight in the workplace.
2. Learn about weight bias including examples of how it shows up in worksite wellness programs.
3. Know how to identify factors that influence bodyweight and evidence-based tactics to maintain a healthy weight.
4. Understand when it’s appropriate to address weight in worksite wellness programs and alternatives to weight-focused programming.

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Pacific Northwest Native

Registered Dietitian, Pediatric & Adult Obesity Training

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Virtual practice focused on medical nutritional therapy for binge eating, emotional eating and overeating.

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CHECKING IN...

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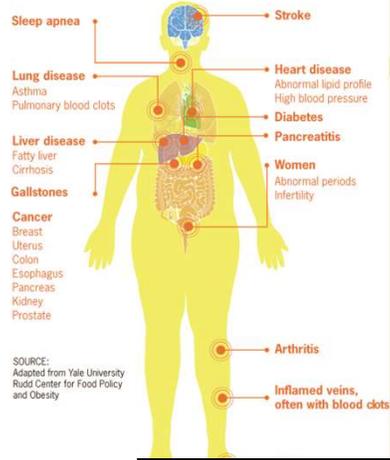
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- What is your “gut reaction” when you hear Biggest Loser?

Thumbs up?
Thumbs down?
Thumbs neutral?

DEFINE TERMS

- BMI: Body Mass Index
 - A calculation that relates height to weight
 - A higher BMI can indicate more metabolically harmful body fat
 - Population research correlates higher BMIs with a greater risk of chronic diseases
 - Used as a screening tool (not diagnostic tool)
- BMI categorizes people into Underweight, Normal Weight, Overweight, Obesity (broken into Class I-III)
- Obesity: Doctor's consider this a serious, treatable disease that may not be controllable by diet/lifestyle alone.

Medical Complications of Obesity



SOURCE:
Adapted from Yale University
Rudd Center for Food Policy
and Obesity

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WHY ARE EMPLOYERS INTERESTED IN ADDRESSING WEIGHT?

ALM | BENEFITS PRO

News

Keep listening to find out why this headline is cringe-worthy...

Obese employees cost their companies more than twice as much as healthy-weight employees

Normal-weight employees cost an average of \$3,830 per year in covered medical, sick day, short-term disability and workers' compensation claims.

By Alan Goforth | November 12, 2021 at 09:16 AM

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THE BIGGEST LOSER

WHAT ARE WE TALKING ABOUT HERE?

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THE BIGGEST LOSER WORKPLACE WELLNESS COMPETITIONS

- Based on the hit TV show that ran on NBC from 2004-2017 where contestants competed for a cash prize based on the greatest weight loss percentage.
- In the workplace:
 - Weekly weigh-ins over a period of time.
 - The person(s) who loses the most weight (or greatest percentage of weight lost) wins rewards.



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BENEFITS OF BIGGEST LOSER COMPETITIONS



Employees love them!

Employee engagement and retention
Accountability and motivation



Team building – everyone is ordering salads for lunch together



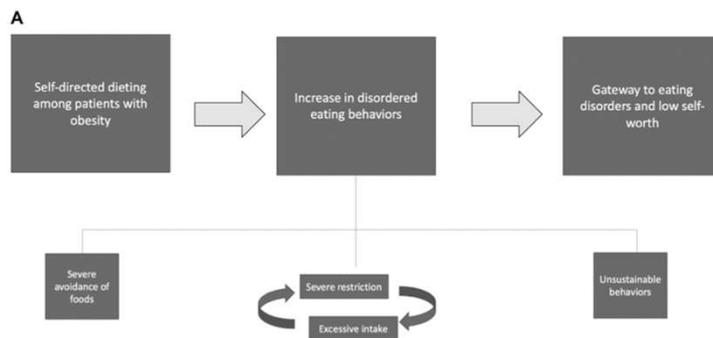
Cheap and easy to implement



Addresses a major issue that individuals and workplaces are concerned about

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DRAWBACKS OF BIGGEST LOSER: SELF-DIRECTED DIETING CAN LEAD TO EATING DISORDERS



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Source: Patient-Centered Care for Obesity. Journal of Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, 2022

How I Won the Biggest Loser Weight Loss Challenge at Work

●● Medium

28 Hours before the final weigh in

The morning before the final weigh in, I weighed 125, which was almost two pounds more than I weighed the week before. I ran for 30 minutes, then took a body rinse and got ready for work. I knew I needed to get down to between 121–122 to win the challenge. I had estimated that my biggest competitor was going to lose 2–2.5 pounds from the week prior based on her trends. How the heck was I going to lose four pounds or more in 24 hours??

I had decided that the only way was going to be to do a fast. I drank a TON of water, green tea, and two cups of dandelion root tea throughout the day. I peed so much that day. All the water weight from having been on my period was finally being flushed out. Because I worked out twice in the 12 hours and was fasting, I knew I needed to hydrate. As soon as I got home

MORE DRAWBACKS



Large amounts of weight loss quickly may not be healthy

Can lose water, muscle
Restriction results in nutrient deficiencies



Long-term behavior change is unlikely

What happens after the prizes are given out and the competition ends?
All or Nothing Thinking

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LEGAL RISKS

HR Daily Advisor

HR MANAGEMENT & COMPLIANCE

Don't Be the Biggest Loser by Sponsoring a Pay-To-Play Weight-Loss Challenge

By Ryan Frazier, Attorney, Kirton McConkie | Feb 20, 2019 | [HR Management & Compliance](#)

Updated: Feb 20, 2019

Question: *We are interested in having a Biggest Loser competition in the workplace, and employees who want to participate would have to pay an enrollment fee. All money will go to the winner. Are there any legal issues we may run into?*

- “Running a weight-loss competition isn’t a really good idea under the law.”**
- **If you collect data, have a responsibility to advise for health improvement.**
 - **Can’t modify for disabilities without providing an advantage**
 - **Not necessarily promoting health!**

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Source: HR Daily Advisor, “Don’t Be the Biggest Loser by Sponsoring a Pay-To-Play Weight-Loss Challenge”

CHECKING IN...

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- What benefits and drawbacks do you see to participating in the Biggest Loser? (Either individually or for your organization)
 - Introduce yourself and share with the people around you.

WEIGHT BIAS & WEIGHT STIGMA

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IMPACTS OF WEIGHT STIGMA

- **Weight Stigma = discriminatory acts against people in larger bodies**
- **Weight Bias = negative ideologies**
- **Both are unbelievably harmful!**

"Assumptions that obesity can be prevented by self-control, that individual non-compliance explains failure at weight-loss (vs. a thyroid condition, etc.), and that obesity is caused by emotional problems, are all examples of attitudes that contribute to negative bias.

...and if obesity is perceived to be a condition of personal choice, versus a serious health condition."

-Obesity Action Coalition, Understanding Obesity Stigma Brochure

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CONSEQUENCES OF WEIGHT BIAS

Health

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Low self-esteem
- Poor body image
- Leading to... unhealthy weight control, binge eating, avoiding physical activity

Other

- In the workplace: hiring discrimination, lower wages, less likely to be promoted, etc.
- At the doctor's office: Well documented worse care

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IS WEIGHT
ENTIRELY UNDER
A PERSON'S
CONTROL?

NO!!!

40-70% based on genetics

60-30% based on other
things

- Some you have control over
- Some you don't: built environment, policies, access to resources

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BACK TO THIS
ARTICLE...

- How much of the "cost" to employers associated with obesity as a disease is due to weight stigma?
- Person first language would be employees with obesity

ALM BENEFITS PRO

News

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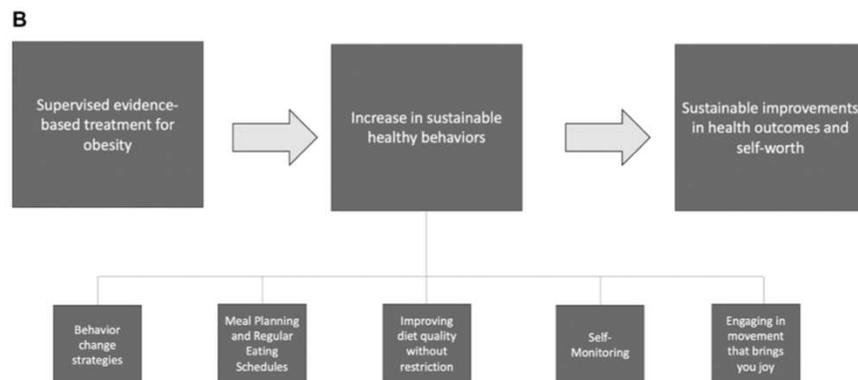
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THE SCIENCE OF WEIGHT MANAGEMENT

A HIGH-LEVEL OVERVIEW

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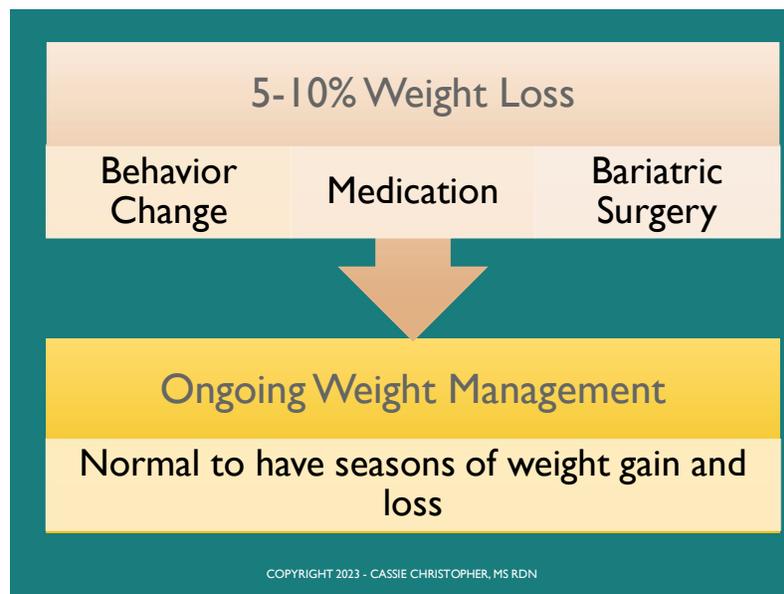
HEALTHY CHANGE HAPPENS WITH QUALIFIED PRACTITIONERS



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Source: Patient-Centered Care for Obesity. Journal of Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, 2022

OBESITY TREATMENT



THE PROBLEM

- 85-95% of diets “fail”
- Losing 5-10% means someone may still be classified as overweight or obese
- Weight loss is not appropriate for underweight or people with active eating disorders.
 - Underweight BMI: refer to MD and RD for individual help
- Weight Loss Maintenance is HARD!!!
 - Need 60-120 calories less
 - 250+ minutes moderate physical activity a week

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WHAT ABOUT WEIGHT LOSS MEDICATIONS?

- Many workplaces are deciding if they should pay for weight loss medications
- Medications are approved by the FDA for weight loss when they support 5-10% weight lost in conjunction with diet and lifestyle change.
- Most medications suppress appetite, which comes back when medication stops



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CHECKING IN...

- In your opinion, is it appropriate to address weight in worksite wellness programs?

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ALTERNATIVES TO WEIGHT-FOCUSED PROGRAMMING



1) FOCUS ON BEHAVIOR
RATHER THAN OUTCOMES



2) FOCUS ON HABIT-BUILDING
RATHER THAN CHALLENGES

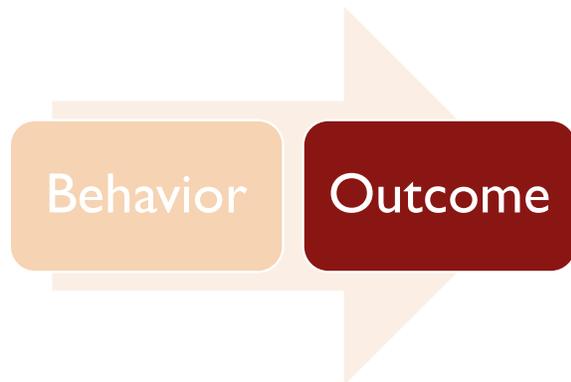


3) ADDRESS NUTRITION IN A
WEIGHT-INCLUSIVE MANNER

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FOCUS ON BEHAVIOR RATHER THAN OUTCOMES

- **Outcomes:** Think traditional data points
 - Ex: Weight, blood pressure, blood glucose measures
- **Behavior:**
 - # of steps in a given day
 - Servings of vegetables consumed
 - Whether you weighed yourself or not
- You have direct control over your behavior, outcomes are usually harder to control.
 - Ex: The moon phase can impact weight by 1-4# on any given day.



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HOW TO DECIDE ON BEHAVIORS TO FOCUS ON

- Take a look at claims and prescription data – what is driving the most cost to the organization?
- Ask employees what they are interested in.
 - Ex: Want stress management but not interested in an hour-long meditation
- Consider wellness program and business goals:
 - Talent retention
 - Engagement
 - HR-PR
- Determine what specific behaviors employees can include that will impact the outcomes:
 - Consult with healthcare professionals
 - Review education on government (CDC) and health organization websites (American Heart Association)

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ALWAYS RELEVANT: PHYSICAL FITNESS

Fitness is a big win: Becoming physically fit reduces the risk of all-cause mortality by 16-30% without weight change.



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2) FOCUS ON HABITS RATHER THAN CHALLENGES

- You will only realize health spending ROI on your efforts if you create habit change.
- Think bigger than challenges, how can you work positive behaviors into the culture?:
 - Ex: Organization with the vision of “Safest and healthiest workforce”
 - Needs assessment/focus groups: discovered food security was a problem for employees
 - Organization decided to subsidize healthy onsite café meals including take home options

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2) FOCUS ON HABITS RATHER THAN CHALLENGES

- Help people connect to intrinsic motivators vs. extrinsic motivators for longer-term, self-motivated change
 - Extrinsic motivators: outside the employee for example - rewards, money, time-limited things
 - Intrinsic motivators: inside the employee, connected to their values
 - Moving their body for fun, because they like to challenge themselves
 - Eating more fiber for regular bowel movements
 - Limiting added sugar for improved energy
 - In education, they've found providing extrinsic motivation early on, before a behavior is completed, may lead to ongoing motivation.
 - Idea: Early participation reward (extrinsic), then programming to help employees discover their intrinsic motivators

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3) ADDRESS NUTRITION IN A WEIGHT INCLUSIVE MANNER

Health at Every Size

Intuitive Eating

Mindful Eating

- Benefits: lower risk for eating disorders, weight maintenance (but not loss), improved nutrition and fitness

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HOW TO DO WEIGHT-BASED PROGRAMMING WITHOUT HARMING ANYONE

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CHECKING IN...

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- What would you include in a weight management program?

WHAT TO DO:

1. Let employees opt-in themselves (versus being invited based on BMI, other factors) while also screening for underweight.
2. Optimally your initiative would be professionally led, at the very least professionally created.
 1. Some credentials to look for: Registered Dietitian, Medical Doctor, additional training or certifications in weight management, Diabetes Prevention Program Training.
3. An evidence-based program that addresses weight bias and doesn't use moralizing language
 1. Also important to address: self-compassion/self-talk, stress, sleep
 2. Behavior rather than outcomes focused
 3. Teach participants how to talk to their doctor about their weight in an empowering way
 4. Address body image and unrealistic cultural expectations

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LEARN MORE

- NPR Life Kit Podcast series on weight (~20 min episodes, or read transcripts):
 - [Boost Your Body Acceptance for Better Health, April 2019](#) : How to combat weight stigma, BMI science
 - [The Biology of Weight Loss, May 2019](#): The science behind why losing weight is hard, and what to do about it
 - [How to Approach Weight Loss Differently, Updated December 2022](#): How to set and work towards good goals
- Obesity Action Coalition – [Weight Bias Resources](#)
- [Cravings Busting Audio Guide](#) (on my website)

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SOURCES

- [HR Daily Advisor article on legal risk of Biggest Loser](#)
- [Patient-Centered Care for Obesity: How Health Care Providers Can Treat Obesity While Actively Addressing Weight Stigma and Eating Disorder Risk](#)
- [Benefits Pro Article on cost of obesity to employers](#)
- [How I Won The Biggest Loser Weight Loss Challenge at Work \(Medium\)](#)
- [No clear winner: effects of The Biggest Loser on the stigmatization of obese persons](#)
- [The effects of reality television on weight bias: an examination of The Biggest Loser](#)

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THANK YOU!

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