

Rethinking the way we address weight in the workplace

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Key takeaways:

- Obesity is a chronic disease that may not be treatable with diet and lifestyle alone. Obesity raises medical costs for employers, and yet incorrectly addressing weight in the workplace may do more harm than good.
- Biggest Loser programming doesn't support healthy behavior change and may put your organization at risk legally.
- Weight stigma is the discrimination against people with overweight and obesity due to the incorrect assumption that their weight is a direct result of their inaction to care for themselves. It results in anxiety, depression, and other mental health concerns.
- 5-10% weight loss is medically significant and can normalize blood sugar, improve heart health and reduce inflammation.
- Alternatives to weight focused programming include:
 - Focusing on behavior rather than outcomes
 - Focusing on habit building rather than one-off challenges
 - Addressing nutrition in a weight-inclusive manner
- To address weight in the workplace consider including the following:
 - Let employees opt-in themselves (versus being invited based on BMI, other factors) while also screening for underweight.
 - Optimally your initiative would be professionally led, at the very least professionally created.
 - Some credentials to look for: Registered Dietitian, Medical Doctor, additional training or certifications in weight management, Diabetes Prevention Program Training.
 - An evidence-based program that addresses weight bias and doesn't use moralizing language
 - Also important to address: self-compassion/self-talk, stress, sleep
 - Behavior rather than outcomes focused
 - Teach participants how to talk to their doctor about their weight in an empowering way
 - Address body image and unrealistic cultural expectations

My favorite resources to 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 \(on my website\)](#)

Sources you may want to check out:

- [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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