

The link between chronic disease and lifestyle

The relationship between lifestyle risk factors and some specific chronic diseases and conditions is highlighted in the following table:

Relationship between selected chronic diseases/conditions and modifiable factors							
Chronic diseases/condition	Behavioural risk factors				Biomedical risk factors		
	Poor diet	Physical inactivity	Tobacco smoking	Excess alcohol use	Excess weight	High blood pressure	High blood cholesterol
Coronary Heart disease	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Cerebrovascular disease	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Colorectal cancer	X	X	X	X	X		
Type 2 diabetes	X	X	X	X	X		
Chronic kidney disease	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Osteoarthritis	X	X	X	X	X		
Osteoporosis	X	X	X	X			

Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2008. Indicators for chronic diseases and their determinants 2008. Canberra: AIHW

There are many other health problems and consequences if you are overweight, including:

- *Sleep apnoea*: A disorder that causes you to pause in breathing or take shallow breaths while you sleep. This occurs when your throat muscles and tongue relax during sleep and block your airways. Sleep apnoea occurs more often in people who are overweight and increases the likelihood of high blood pressure, stroke, heart attack and heart failure.
- *Hypertension* (high blood pressure): A condition that makes the heart work harder to pump blood throughout your body. Hypertension contributes to the hardening of your arteries and the development of heart failure.
- *Fatty Liver Disease*: Describes a range of conditions caused by an accumulation of fat in the liver and can cause your liver to function abnormally. A common cause of Fatty Liver Disease is obesity.
- *High cholesterol*: Cholesterol is a type of fat. However, if you have too much it starts to build up in your arteries and can harden them. As a result, if you have high cholesterol you have an increased risk of heart attack, stroke and other [cardiovascular diseases](#).
- *Infertility*: Being overweight can lead to hormonal changes that can cause infertility. Infertility is a condition where you are unable to conceive a child.
- *Impotence*: Overweight or obese men have a 30 per cent increased chance of impotence, which means a man is unable to get a good enough erection to have intercourse. Research has found that 8 out of 10 men with erectile problems are overweight.
- *Stress*: People who are overweight face an increased risk of psychological problems such as social isolation, depression and difficulty with interpersonal relationships.

Chronic diseases are serious problems that may require ongoing medication for life but most chronic diseases are preventable for most people through healthy lifestyle choices. Evidence shows that improving diet and being more physically active can help prevent or delay the onset of such chronic diseases.

There are simple measures you can take to decrease your risk of chronic disease and other health problems. Go to [Tips for getting active](#) and [What should I be eating?](#) for some practical tips you can follow.

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