



How can we begin the year and not discuss the important topic of weight management? Obesity rates in older adults can be alarming. As the number of older adults increases rapidly, the national epidemic of obesity is also affecting our aging population. This includes residents in nursing homes. Weight management is extremely important for older adults given the risks associated. Consider the following when assisting residents with weight management:

- As muscle mass decreases over time, fat mass increases.
- Being overweight can limit mobility and make maintaining independence more challenging due to the strain on joints.
- Older adults who struggle with obesity also have higher rates of depression.
- Older adults naturally lose about 20 percent of our skin's dermal thickness, therefore, those who are overweight and obese can more easily develop pressure sores.
- Residents may continue to eat the same amount of food as they did when they were younger, even though they're less active.
- Hormonal changes that occur as we age contribute to weight management concerns. For example, we develop a resistance to leptin, a protein hormone that regulates energy intake and expenditure. It's also believed that aging plays a role in reduced responsiveness to thyroid hormone.
- A change in metabolism in older adults contributes to quicker weight gain and slower weight loss. The digestive system works less efficiently, which means less energy from food is burned off as calories while more is stored as fat.
- Resident's environments may limit access to exercise and activities to promote mobility.
- Obesity is a leading risk factor for type 2 diabetes and heart disease.
- Obesity in seniors increases the risk of [respiratory disease, arthritis, and skin conditions](#).
- Genetics play a role in weight and the ability to lose it.

There are a variety of things your facility can do to assist residents in maintaining a healthy weight.

- Assist residents in focusing on appropriate modifications to eating.
- Develop support in weight management efforts and education for residents, which includes family members and friends.
- Provide routine physical activity designed to preserve muscle and bone mass, such as stretching, aerobics, and strengthening exercises (including the frail elderly). Consider short intervals throughout the day. For example, a resident can gain as much physical benefit from three 10-minute exercise sessions than one for a total of 30 minutes.
- Provide an environment that promotes physical and mental activity.
- Partner with the physician and pharmacist to evaluate the effects of prescription drugs on resident's weight.
- Facilitate optimal sleep, which helps burn more calories (certain hormone changes occur when residents do not receive proper sleep.)



- Provide protein sources that promote healthy muscle development, but if certain sources of protein, such as meat, are harder to eat, focus on other, softer sources of protein like yogurt or eggs.
- Work closely with Dietitians to provide lean protein, lots of colorful vegetables, whole grains, and two servings of fruit daily, which is a good guideline for healthy residents. Resident's health conditions should be addressed regarding the best diet.
- Encourage drinking plenty of water to promote optimal hydration.
- Encourage hobbies to prevent over-snacking out of boredom.

Likewise, be alert to unintentional weight loss in residents. The most common etiologies are malignancy, nonmalignant gastrointestinal disease, and psychiatric conditions. Weigh patients on a regular basis and monitor their progress. If significant changes are noted, the team should evaluate potential causes and investigate.

### Make good nutrition and weight management a new year priority!

atom Alliance can assist with sharing and identification of best practices for addressing weight management concerns. For more guidance, contact the atom Alliance Quality Improvement Advisor for Kentucky, Scott Gibson at [scott.gibson@area-G.hcqis.org](mailto:scott.gibson@area-G.hcqis.org) or by phone at 502-680-2669. All our services are free, and we offer many educational tools to assist. **This has been an active flu season. As always, please encourage your residents and staff to protect themselves and obtain tetanus, pneumococcal, and influenza vaccines.**

### More on atom Alliance

Formed as a partnership between three leading healthcare consultancies, atom Alliance is working under contract to CMS throughout Alabama, Indiana, Kentucky, Mississippi and Tennessee to improve quality and achieve better outcomes in health and healthcare and at lower costs for the patients and communities we serve.

Through atom Alliance, AQAF in Alabama, IQH in Mississippi and Qsource in Indiana, Kentucky and Tennessee are carrying out an exciting strategic plan, with programs in place to convene, teach and inform healthcare providers, engage and empower patients, and inspire, share knowledge and spread best practices with communities across the entire healthcare continuum. Learn more at [www.atomAlliance.org](http://www.atomAlliance.org).

#### References

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