



World Obesity Day

11th October 2018

End Weight Stigma

A **campaign toolkit** for
members and supporters

WORLD OBESITY
DAY 2018

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What is World Obesity Day?

World Obesity Day is an annual campaign with the goal of stimulating and supporting practical actions that will help people achieve and maintain a healthy weight and lifestyle.

Actions to address obesity include:

- Implementing policies to improve the environments we live in
- Providing healthcare services that offer support and treatment for people living with obesity
- Educating populations about the risks and causes of obesity
- Addressing stigma and misconceptions surrounding obesity





Who runs World Obesity Day?

World Obesity Day is led by the World Obesity Federation. The World Obesity Federation represents professional members of the scientific, medical and research communities from over 50 regional and national obesity associations. This helps to create a global community of organisations dedicated to solving the problems of obesity.

World Obesity's mission is to lead and drive global efforts to reduce, prevent and treat obesity.

with obesity. No country is currently on track to meet the target to halt the rise in obesity based on 2010 levels and the global medical bill to treat the consequences of obesity is estimated to rise to **\$1.2 trillion a year by 2025.**

The prevalence of obesity is most alarming in low and middle-income countries, which now face a double burden of undernutrition and obesity. For instance, between 1980 and 2015, obesity in India doubled for children and tripled for adults. In China, more than a quarter of children are expected to be classified as being overweight or having obesity by 2030.

Obesity is both a risk factor for non-communicable diseases (NCDs), as well as a disease in its own right. Obesity acts as a gateway disease to NCDs, such as heart disease, cancer, diabetes and liver disease, which are responsible for over 70% of deaths worldwide. All elements of society have a role to play in reducing obesity and addressing its drivers, from town planners, to schools, to employers to health service providers.

**1.9 billion
adults were classified
as overweight
in 2016**

Who is this toolkit for?

This toolkit is for anyone who wishes to get involved with World Obesity Day 2018. It provides information about the topic – weight stigma – as well as resources and information to help them get involved with the campaign.

About Obesity

Obesity is rapidly becoming one of the biggest public health priorities globally. Worldwide obesity has nearly tripled since 1975. More than 1.9 billion adults were classified as overweight in 2016 – more than 650 million of whom were living

World Obesity Day 2018

END
WEIGHT
STIGMA



This World Obesity Day we are focusing on stigma. **Weight stigma** is one of the last socially acceptable forms of discrimination ¹.

Weight stigma refers to negative behaviours and attitudes that are directed towards individuals solely because of their weight. Negative and inaccurate stereotypes associated with weight include depictions of laziness, lack of will power, a lack of moral character, bad hygiene, low levels of competence and intelligence and unattractiveness².

Research has demonstrated that weight stigma is a global phenomenon, prominent in many countries

around the world.^{3,4} In the United States, for instance, it has been reported that weight stigma almost doubled between 1995-6 and 2004-6⁵.

Currently, weight stigma is relatively absent from the conversation surrounding obesity. If we are to end obesity stigma, it's important to adjust our language and attitudes, raise awareness and improve our knowledge about the impact of weight stigma.

Did you know?

- **Stigma does not just have emotional effects.** It can have severe physical effects too. The fear of being stigmatised can result in the avoidance of seeking medical care and desperate pursuits of weight loss can lead to disordered eating. There are even reports of suicidal thoughts and acts.^{6,7,8}
- **Stigma can also impact people's social lives and relationships.** Individuals have reported engaging in **selective social isolation** which refers to avoiding social situations in an effort to remain unnoticed through fear of being stigmatised⁹.

- **Weight stigma can be internalised.**

Those that face stigmatisation have reported feeling powerless to challenge it. This can lead individuals to believe that the negative stereotypes attributed to them are true and that they deserve the stigmatisation they receive¹⁰.

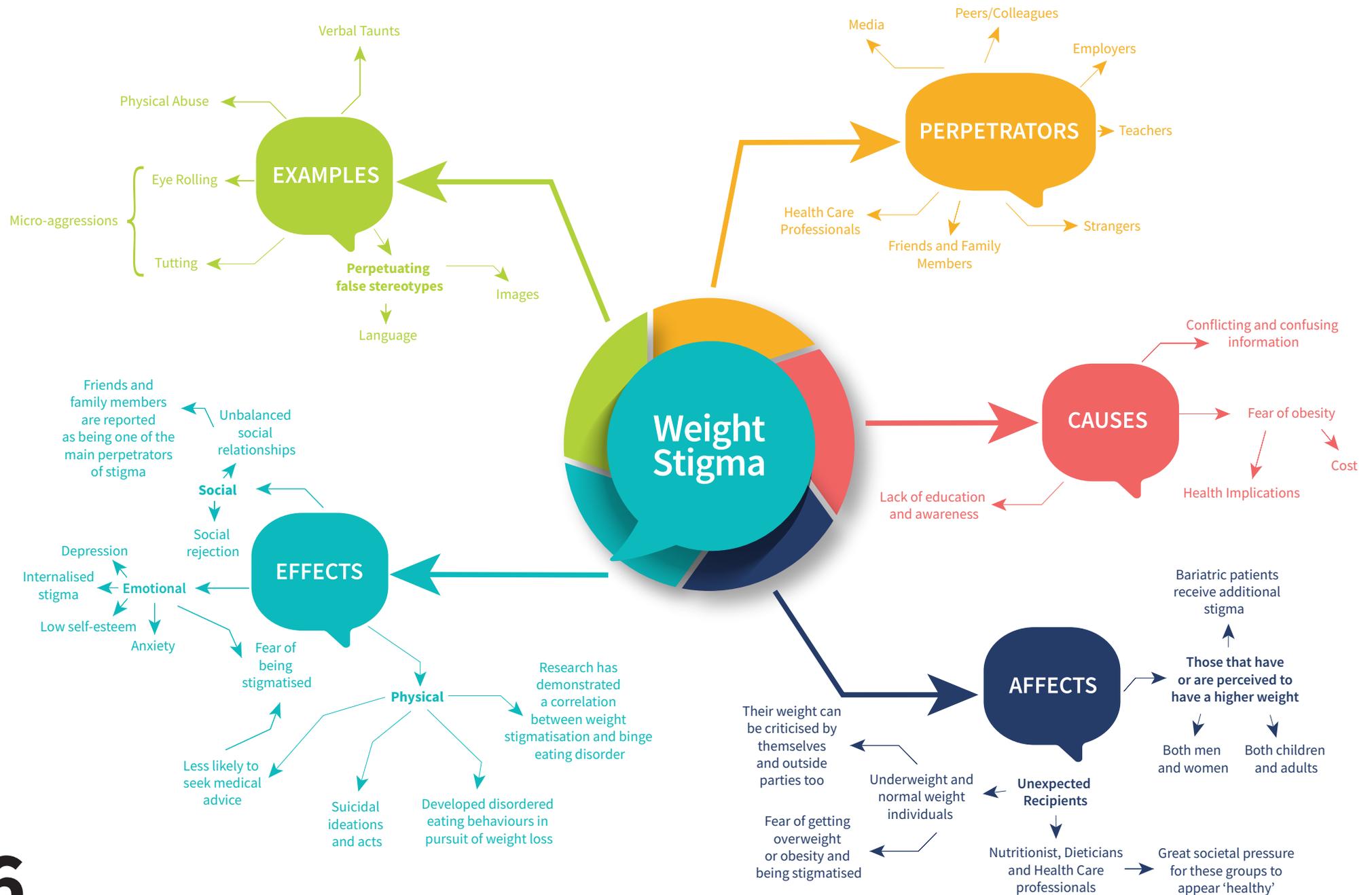
- **The stereotypical and widely perceived causal attributes of obesity such as laziness and overeating play an integral role in the generation of weight bias¹¹.**

- The **media have an important role to play when it comes to the stigmatisation of weight¹².** The content of the majority of stories contain negative stereotypes that are often portrayed through negative language and images.

By focusing on stigma this World Obesity Day we aim to:

- Raise awareness about the presence and impact of weight stigma and what can be done about it
- Increase member engagement and encourage engagement with advocacy/campaigning on weight stigma
- Help people overcome the barriers that arise as a result of stigma, which can prevent them getting the medical treatment they need.

Weight stigma is more complex than people realise, with a wide range of drivers, sources, effects and recipients.



Key messages

We hope to raise awareness about this the complexity of weight stigma as part of this year's campaign.

Our key messages are as follows:

1

Stigmatising obesity undermines people's health and makes it harder to seek support

- Weight stigma in health services deters people from seeking help with weight management
- Stigma has been shown to undermine people's broader health and can lead to internalised personal blame, anxiety, depression and low self-esteem. Changing the narrative around diseases and conditions (such as was done for HIV) can transform public perceptions and improve quality of life and outcomes for patients.

2

Negative images and language reinforce stigma around obesity

- Media reporting typically suggests that obesity results from poor individual behaviours and choices, leading to misconceptions about the causes of obesity
- Better language and respectful imagery is needed to reduce stigma and create a more informative and accurate narrative.

3

Modern environments encourage and promote unhealthy lifestyles. Obesity is not about individual blame but shared responsibility in society

- The current narrative ignores the complex interplay of a dysfunctional food system, genetics and barriers within health systems
- The risk posed to health by modern environments is irrespective of genetic makeup or weight control motivations.

- Few people choose to develop obesity, and weight gain is very hard to reverse. Once obesity develops, the body strives to keep the higher weight by becoming more fuel-efficient and by increasing the desire to eat
- Telling individuals to 'eat less, move more' is too simplistic: reducing risk requires an integrated approach across different sectors, from our town centres to healthcare settings.

4

A positive, supportive narrative between clinicians and their patients will increase the effectiveness of care.

- Decreasing stigma will empower individuals to seek help and support care when they need it, reduce treatment drop-out, and increase patient satisfaction
- Seeking medical care can be a challenge for individuals who have been made to feel that they have caused their own disease
- This is due to the stigma they face from society regarding their right to medical care and the stigma they face from health professionals during consultations.

Calls to Action

As part of this this year's campaign we are calling for:



Everyone throughout society has a role to play in helping to end obesity stigma, including the media, health care professionals, teachers and employers.

1. More consideration from media outlets surrounding the language and images they use in reports relating to obesity.

The way in which obesity is commonly portrayed in the media reinforces inaccurate and negative stereotypes about weight and can lead to weight stigma. Here are some tips designed to support journalists reporting in the media, which will help reduce weight stigma.

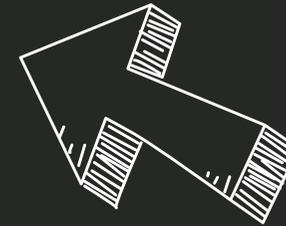
- Derogatory and pejorative labels and references about people with obesity should be avoided
- People-first language should be used, i.e. 'people with obesity' as opposed to 'obese people'
- False and inaccurate stereotypes about obesity should be avoided
- Images that accompany news stories should not portray individuals with obesity negatively
- Headless figures, individuals wearing ill-fitting clothing and engaging in stereotypical behaviour (e.g. consuming unhealthy food) are de-humanising and create unfair generalisations about those with obesity.

2. Greater sensitivity and efficacy from health care providers in diagnosing and treating individuals with obesity.

A positive, supportive narrative between clinicians and their patients will increase the effectiveness of care. The following steps will help ensure HCPs are providing the best, non-stigmatising care to their patients

- Research has shown that language such as 'high BMI' and 'weight' are preferred to words like 'obese' and 'morbidly obese'¹³. In addition, it has been recommended that asking your patient which terms they prefer is an effective option¹⁴.
- People-first language that puts the patient before the medical condition and avoids categorising patients by their medical condition. For example, 'you have obesity' as opposed to 'you are obese'.
- Focus on the why in addition to the what. Obesity is complex and there are a variety of different reasons as to why a patient may have the condition. Therefore, clinicians should also seek to find the determinants of certain behaviours associated with obesity¹⁵.
- Patients with obesity should be treated with the same level of respect and empathy as their slimmer counterparts.

Visit www.imagebank.worldobesity.org for a selection of images which do not reinforce negative stereotypes about obesity.



Regardless of genetic makeup or weight control motivations, individuals have increased risk of obesity because of a modern environment that encourages and promotes unhealthy lifestyles.

In addition, it is important to remember that not every medical issue will necessarily be weight related. You should avoid letting a patient's weight impede your care and diagnoses.

3. Greater awareness about sources of weight stigma and steps to avoid it in community settings, including workplaces and schools.

There is consistent evidence of weight discrimination at every stage of employment including; career counselling, interviews and hiring processes, salary disparities, fewer promotions, harsher disciplinary actions and more dismissals¹⁶. Furthermore, the school environment is renowned for teasing and bullying and weight is one of the primary reasons for victimisation^{17,18}.

We recommend that all places of work:

- Implement policies that protect employees, employers, students and clients with respect irrespective of their weight.
- Take steps to raise awareness about and prevent weight discrimination.

4. Government commitment to introduce upstream policies to improve the environments we live in, rather than focus on individual responsibility and blame.

Regardless of genetic makeup or weight control motivations, individuals have increased risk of obesity because of a modern environment that encourages and promotes unhealthy lifestyles. Reducing the risk of obesity requires governments to take an integrated approach across different sectors, which should incorporate:

- Implementation of policies which address obesogenic food environments, improving the availability and access to nutritious food and reducing exposure to marketing of less healthy options.
- Introduction of policies and town planning protocols which improve urban environments, ensuring they are walkable, have green space and are conducive to more activity as part of people's daily lives.
- Consideration of health in all policies, to ensure action is taken in all relevant sectors from health, to education, to media and culture, to development and social services.

World Obesity Day resources

World Obesity Federation has produced the following materials to help you get involved and keep up to date with this year's campaign. Keep visiting our website to make sure you don't miss out on new resources and materials which are being published throughout September:



- **Weekly campaign e-bulletin**

You can sign up for updates here:

<https://www.obesityday.worldobesity.org/>

- **Infographics with key messages**

This year's infographics will be made available here:

<https://www.obesityday.worldobesity.org/infographics>

- **Template press release**

For help writing your own press release have a look at our guide in Appendix 2. Alternatively we have a template press release ready for you to download and use on our website:

<https://www.obesityday.worldobesity.org/resources>

- **Template letter to media**

We have created a template letter for you to highlight examples of stigmatising images or language in the media which you can download on our website:

<https://www.obesityday.worldobesity.org/write-to-the-media>

- **Template tweets**

put together some ideas for tweets that you could post here:
<https://www.obesityday.worldobesity.org/social-media>.

If you're new to twitter check out our social media guide in Appendix 1.

- **Free SCOPE modules on weight stigma**

We have three modules dedicated to stigma which are available free of charge upon registration.

Find out more here: www.scope-elearning.org



Get Involved

To help make World Obesity Day a success we need your help!

There are many ways to get involved in World Obesity Day, no matter who you are, where you are or how much time you have. Your involvement could be about raising awareness through social media, engaging the public on key matters related to obesity, or even speaking up and calling out individuals and groups that stigmatise weight.

Of course, you do not have to feel restricted by our suggestions. Please feel free to organise your own campaign or event.

Visit <https://www.obesityday.worldobesity.org/world-obesity-day-2018>

Or email WOD@worldobesity.org for more information

1. Join our webinar!

We will be holding a webinar on Wednesday 19th September at 4pm (BST) which will focus on World Obesity Day and weight stigma.

Join the webinar live or listen back to the recording to find out more this year's campaign and how you can get involved. You can register for the webinar here

<https://www.obesityday.worldobesity.org/world-obesity-day-2018>.

A recording of the webinar will also be available on this page after it has taken place.

2. Write to the media to highlight the issue of weight stigma

The media have an important role to play when it comes to ending weight stigma¹⁹. The content of many stories contain negative stereotypes

that are often portrayed through negative language and images.

We will be publishing a report on World Obesity Day which shows the use of stigmatising imagery in over 20 countries around the world, and also highlights the language that is used to describe obesity and the people living with obesity. You'll be able to download the report here:

<https://www.obesityday.worldobesity.org/resources>

We encourage you to challenge the media about the way that they portray obesity.

On our website www.obesityday.worldobesity.org you can find a list of existing media standard councils around the world. If your country is included in the list, we recommend you write to them with any examples of stigmatising images or language that you may come across. We have even created a template letter that you can easily download and use here:

<https://www.obesityday.worldobesity.org/write-to-the-media>

3. Provide your stories and experiences about weight stigma

Have you or someone you know experienced weight discrimination? Share your story!

As part of World Obesity Day, we will be developing a range of materials for our members and other interested individuals and organisations to use to help with advocacy, awareness-raising and communication projects to coincide with World Obesity Day.

To help inform these materials and ensure we have strong and convincing evidence to talk to a range of audiences – from the public through to media – we are asking you to submit people/ patient stories that you feel can bring to life the weight stigma theme.

We are looking for stories that show how weight stigma can impact on a person's life, for example:

- the discrimination faced
- how stigma has prevented the person getting treatment or support
- or, how positive language and imagery empowers patients and helps reduce their personal risk of obesity

For more information and to submit your own experiences, please visit <https://www.obesityday.worldobesity.org/tell-us-your-stories> or email WOD@worldobesity.org

4. Consider the words and language you use

World Obesity has an image bank filled with non-stigmatising images. They are completely free to use and very easy to download. You can consider using the images in presentations, reports and other materials you may produce as part of your work.

<http://www.imagebank.worldobesity.org/>

Additionally, we have written a report about the current portrayal of obesity and people with obesity in the media. Within this report we have highlighted some of the prevalent problematic language being used and offered some less stigmatising alternatives.

This report can be found here:

<https://www.obesityday.worldobesity.org/resources>



5. Social media

Tweet, share, post, comment, 'like', 'favourite' all things to do with **#WorldObesityDay** and **#endweightstigma**. You can follow us **@endweightstigma** on twitter for the latest updates.

Let us know what you are doing through social media! We are tracking what is happening around the world and would encourage you to share with us what you are doing. Tweet us and we can share, respond and retweet your actions.

Together we can help to end weight stigma.

We have put together a list of suggested tweets to help you get started. These can be found here:

<https://www.obesityday.worldobesity.org/social-media>



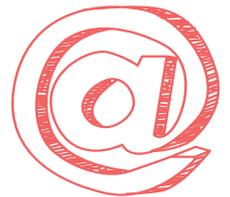
6. Enhance your knowledge and expertise around obesity and stigma

World Obesity Federation offers an internationally recognised obesity education programme named SCOPE (Specialist Certification in Obesity Professional Education). We have an abundance of modules that focus on different specific areas surrounding obesity.

We also have three modules that concentrate specifically on weight stigma.

Use this link to sign up and access them for FREE

www.scope-elearning.org



Useful information

Publications and reports on stigma

- Angela Meadows (2018) Discrimination Against Fat People is so Endemic Most of Us Don't Even Realise It's Happening. The Conversation <https://theconversation.com/discrimination-against-fat-people-is-so-endemic-most-of-us-dont-even-realise-its-happening-94862>
- Puhl, R et al. (2017) **The Role of Stigma in Weight Loss Maintenance Among US Adults** http://uconnruddcenter.org/files/Pdfs/art%253A10_1007%25Fs12160-017-9898-9.pdf
- Stuart Flint and James Nobles (2017) Obesity is About Much More Than an Unhealthy Lifestyle. The Conversation <https://theconversation.com/obesity-is-about-much-more-than-an-unhealthy-lifestyle-83687>
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For more information about World Obesity and all of our different projects and campaigns visit www.worldobesity.org

Appendices

Appendix 1: Social Media Guide

Social media gives you a platform for making your messages more accessible and for networking with wider audiences nationally and internationally. It is becoming an increasingly popular tool in advocacy as it is free and easy to use.

It can be useful for:

- Getting messages out to large numbers of people
- Promoting activities and events
- Getting support for a specific call to action/petition
- Directly targeting politicians
- Reaching consumers and organisations alike
- Keeping up to date with others' activities

/ LinkedIn



You can get involved with World Obesity discussions through the **World Obesity LinkedIn group**. You can also set up your own page to promote activities and work to your own members.

/ Twitter



Twitter is one of the most commonly used social media platforms in advocacy.

Tweets can be best described as short 'snippets' of information with a 280-character limit (including any links) and can be used to share links, give top tips and statistics as well as promote news stories and campaign updates.

Follow us **@WorldObesity** and **#endweightstigma**.

/ Twitter jargon

- **#hashtags** – These are key words in a tweet preceding by a '#' which helps to improve search ability and group your tweet with others using the same hashtag
- **RT (Retweets)** – You can retweet someone else's tweet if you like what they are saying (MT = modified tweet)
- **Replies** – you can send a reply to a tweet, in answer to a question or to comment on what someone else has said
- **@Username (Mentions)** – you can send a tweet to someone, or mention them in a tweet by using the '@' symbol followed by their twitter name.



Appendix 2: Writing your own press release

Before you start

- Have a legitimate news angle (announcing something new and/or timely)
- Know your numbers. Is what you've done relevant?
- Is there a particular date that you want to get your press coverage e.g. to tie in with the launch of campaign? Think ahead and make sure you send it to the press with sufficient time
- Know your audience – e.g. newspaper, radio, magazine

/ Date and embargo Date your press release, particularly if it is not for immediate release. Include an embargo date and time clearly in red at the top of the release, and indicate time zones, particularly for international press releases.

/ Catchy headline A clear and catchy headline (and email subject line when you send out the press release) will attract journalists seeking good stories. Your headline should be as engaging as it is accurate.

/ Summary Emphasise the key points that you want included in any news stories. Get the message of your press release out quickly. Every important point should be addressed in the first few sentences. The subsequent paragraphs should be for supporting information.

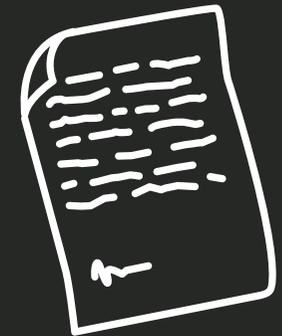
/ Use the introductory paragraph to sum up the story in 50-100 words – it could be all that gets read! Stick to the facts. Explain **who** you are, **what** you're announcing, **where** it is taking place, **when** it's happening, plus possibly **why** and **how**. These questions communicate the story arc. "who, what, where, when, why".

/ Empirical evidence Leave the artistry to the journalist - your press release should be filled with factual numbers that support the significance of your research or other announcement. If you're claiming a trend, you need proof to back it up. Quantify your argument and it will become much more compelling.

/ Include a quote by a person who conducted research or is an expert in the area. This adds a human element to the press release, as well as being a source of information in its own right. Remember to make sure that the quoted person is available for further interviews if required.

/ Length: keep it short, about 1-2 sides of A4. Also include graphics for extra information which may be useful to the journalist, and will also serve to grab their attention.

/ Contact information Make sure that the journalist can get in contact with you should they have any queries or require further information. It is also good to provide them with some information about your organisation or project, as well as any links to relevant information which they may find useful.



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For more information

www.obesityday.worldobesity.org/world-obesity-day-2018