

Healthy Weight Focus



A HOLISTIC
APPROACH



At Desjardins Insurance, we promote overall wellness, and Healthy Weight Focus is just one of many wellness solutions we offer. It's a holistic approach to weight management and obesity care inspired by our partner Obesity Canada's Clinical Practice Guidelines, which offer an evidence-based, patient-centred framework to obesity care. Because obesity care is about health, not weight.

Obesity: challenges and solutions

Obesity, typically identified by a body mass index (BMI) of 30 or higher, is a complex, progressive, chronic disease characterized by abnormal or excessive body fat (adiposity) that impairs health, increases the risk of long-term medical complications and even decreases life expectancy. Because it presents differently in different people, it requires personalized treatment and ongoing support.¹ And yet, the social stigma surrounding obesity can create barriers that prevent people with obesity from seeking medical help due to fear of judgment or discrimination.

"Obesity is a chronic disease caused by the complex interplay of genetic, metabolic, behavioural and environmental factors. We need a science-based and compassionate view that obesity, like many other chronic diseases, isn't a choice."

– Dayna Lee-Baggley, Ph.D. Clinical Psychology

But it's important for people to get the care they need. Individuals with obesity need to know that there are tools available to them and that they'll get support if they choose to seek help. By providing access to information and a supportive environment, employers can help individuals feel empowered to seek the treatment they may need to improve their health.

Most research done on the subject has focused on weight-loss outcomes, showing, for example, that even a modest weight loss of 5% to 10% is associated with improvements in both blood pressure and cholesterol levels.^{2,3} However, weight loss is only one part of the solution. We believe that the goal of obesity management is improved health and well-being, involving all the dimensions of overall wellness – not simply numbers on a scale.

Healthy Weight Focus encompasses a broad spectrum of coverage options for different services, such as support for **nutrition therapy, physical activity, psychological and behavioural therapy and pharmacotherapy.**



¹ Warthon et al., [Obesity in adults: a clinical practice guideline](#), 2020.

² Warthon et al., [Obesity in adults: a clinical practice guideline](#), 2020.

³ Ryan and Yockey, [Weight Loss and Improvement in Comorbidity: Differences at 5%, 10% 15%, and over](#), 2018.



Multidisciplinary care and treatments

Being able to access treatments and care from a variety of medical professionals gives plan members access to tools that can help them undertake their journey to better health. It also makes it easier to develop and maintain healthy behaviours in a way that's realistic and sustainable. That's why the following types of care can be added to the plans we offer:

Dietitian, nutritionist

These specialists provide support with diet and nutrition and can help plan members with everything from meal planning (purchases, food combinations) to eating habits. They can also help with specific nutritional needs.

Kinesiologist

Kinesiologists are human movement specialists who use science and research to offer movement as medicine. They evaluate the dynamics of motion and adapt exercises to suit a person's weight and ability, optimizing movement and performance.

Psychologist, psychotherapist

People with obesity experience weight bias and stigma, which can lead to feelings of shame, self-blame, anxiety, depression, and poor self-esteem.⁴ Psychologists and psychotherapists can help people explore these issues and find ways to overcome these barriers to wellness. They can also help identify factors that influence behaviours that are within people's power to change (sedentary lifestyle, diet, etc.). Additionally, psychologists can provide evidence-based ways to change habits and health behaviours that are more effective than simply relying on willpower.⁵

⁴ Obesity Canada, [Weight Bias](#).

⁵ Canadian Adult Obesity Clinical Practice Guidelines: Effective Psychological and Behavioural Interventions in Obesity Management, 2020. Vallis TM et al. [Canadian Adult Obesity Clinical Practice Guidelines: Effective Psychological and Behavioural Interventions in Obesity Management](#), 2020.

The social impacts of obesity⁶

Bias, stigma, and discrimination impact employees with obesity at every stage of the employment process from hiring to compensation, promotion, and termination.

Weight bias: Negative attitudes and views about obesity and about people with obesity.

Weight stigma: Social stereotypes that attribute negative characteristics to people with obesity.

Weight discrimination: When personal biases and social stereotypes cloud our judgment, resulting in the unfair treatment of people with obesity.

Weight discrimination can include:

- Verbal discrimination
- Physical discrimination
- Barriers, such as undersized chairs or non-inclusive uniform sizes
- Denial of access to healthcare

Pharmacotherapy

The introduction of safe and effective medications for long-term obesity management is a major medical milestone for people living with obesity. These medications can be an essential part of a holistic approach to obesity care.

Additional healthcare support

Many other types of healthcare specialists can play a role in obesity care and weight management. Osteopaths and physiotherapists can help manage pain so people can get moving. Alternative medicine practitioners such as acupuncturists, naturopaths and homeopaths can provide relief for some people. Occupational therapists can help improve the quality of life of people living with obesity by helping them achieve greater independence in their daily activities. And social workers can help improve psychosocial well-being. These professionals are all useful resources that can help improve overall wellness and may be covered by your plan.

Introducing Constant Health

Desjardins has partnered with Constant Health, a leading Canadian provider of personalized obesity care and educational resources, to offer additional support to plan members. The program offers personalized support and guidance from a dedicated team of registered dietitians trained in both nutrition science and behaviour change.

Plan members have access to preferred pricing for a comprehensive 15-week program, and expenses may also be eligible for reimbursement under coverage for the services of a dietitian/nutritionist. For more information on this partnership, please visit constanthealth.ca/desjardins/aom.





What organizations can do

Organizations can do their part to make sure that the physical environment is welcoming and inclusive to people of all sizes. They can also create a work environment that encourages healthy habits for everyone.

Suggestions for employers:

- Offer specialized training about obesity, such as Obesity Canada's Chronic Disease in the Workplace
- Make sure workplace furniture can accommodate all body types
- Cover specialists that are part of Healthy Weight Focus
- Add a wellness account that covers health-related expenses and programs*
- Offer equipment and/or uniforms that fit all bodies comfortably and safely
- Promote healthy lifestyle habits that can contribute to the overall wellness of all employees
- Include healthy food on the cafeteria menu or in vending machines

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Employers can provide tools and resources to their management employees, such as the [Best Practices for Managing Obesity in the Workplace](#) course from Obesity Canada.

Healthy Weight Focus isn't one specific type of coverage—it's a combination of complementary treatments, products and services available through different benefits to provide insureds with better coverage. Depending on which options you choose to cover, additional costs may apply.

If you're interested in enhancing your group insurance plan's healthy weight coverage, or for more information about your current coverage and the options available, please contact your benefits advisor or group insurance representative.

* Wellness accounts are available exclusively to groups with a minimum of 50 plan members.

"When employers take steps to address weight bias and discrimination, employees living with obesity can experience significant improvements in their careers, mental health, financial well-being, and workplace relationships. Employers, in turn, benefit from reduced turnover, heightened employee engagement and productivity, and lower absenteeism, presenteeism, disability, and insurance costs. Ultimately, this approach helps both employees and employers thrive."

– Dayna Lee-Baggley, Ph.D. Clinical Psychology



Obesity Canada: Addressing social stigma

Since 2020, Desjardins Insurance has been partnering with [Obesity Canada](#)—an organization dedicated to improving the lives of Canadians living with obesity. Obesity Canada is working to change perceptions and address the social stigma associated with obesity, so that people can be understood, respected, and live healthy lives.

This partnership is aligned with the kinds of initiatives that have made Desjardins Insurance a leader in overall wellness. This position reflects our mission to enrich the lives of people and communities. That mission, combined with our range of products, and the credibility and quality of the support we offer, make Desjardins Insurance a preferred partner in group insurance for all organizations that care about their people's wellness.



About Desjardins Insurance

Desjardins Insurance offers a wide range of flexible life insurance, health insurance and retirement savings products and services. They have been providing innovative services to individuals, groups and businesses for over a century. Desjardins Insurance ensures the financial security of over five million Canadians from offices across the country. It is one of the top life insurance companies in Canada and a member of Desjardins Group, the leading cooperative financial group in Canada.

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