

Preventing, Diagnosing, and Treating COVID-19 in Patients With Obesity or Other Metabolic Disorders



Going Viral
COVID-19 and Obesity

Assessing Patient Risk

[One in three adult Americans](#) has metabolic syndrome. Patients managing metabolic disorders, including obesity, present an increased risk for severe COVID-19 due to a combination of an impaired immune response and chronic inflammation. Obesity can cause dysregulation of the [T-cell response](#) in the body, creating an upregulation of inflammatory responses. When combined with the chronic inflammation many patients managing obesity experience, the body generates an impaired immune response, hindering the body's ability to effectively fight off viral infections like COVID-19.

Obesity is also associated with reduced lung function, increasing the risk of respiratory failure, and cardiovascular disease, which has been linked to severe COVID-19 by [multiple studies](#). Moreover, because of this reduced lung function, patients who have obesity are at higher risk of needing respiratory support, both non-invasive and invasive with mechanical ventilation. Once patients with obesity require ventilation, they tend to have more difficulty weaning off ventilator dependence.

Preventing COVID-19

Vaccination

- There are currently [three types](#) of COVID-19 vaccines – mRNA, protein subunit, and viral vector.
- The [COVID-19 vaccines and boosters](#) are recommended for patients managing obesity and other metabolic disorders. While there are [studies](#) that suggest individuals with obesity may have a weaker immune response to these vaccines than people without obesity, the risks associated with not getting vaccinated and potentially contracting COVID-19 are generally considered to be greater. Vaccinations can still provide some level of protection against the virus, even if effectiveness may be slightly reduced.

Additional Measures

- In addition to vaccines, clinicians can recommend good hand hygiene, masking in crowded indoor settings, eating a healthy diet, sufficient sleep, and regular physical activity as additional preventative measures.

Diagnosing COVID-19

There are [two types](#) of tests available, polymerase chain reaction (PCR) tests and rapid antigen tests:

- PCR tests are still the most reliable method of testing for COVID-19. PCR tests are especially recommended for those who do not have symptoms following exposure or need to confirm the results of antigen tests.
- Rapid antigen tests do not reliably detect a recently contracted COVID-19 infection. However, they are readily accessible and suitable for patient at-home use, offering rapid results to those who have symptoms and have been exposed to the virus.

Treating COVID-19 in Patients with Obesity

[Early treatment](#) can help reduce the severity and duration of COVID-19 symptoms. By starting treatment as soon as possible, patients may be able to avoid developing dangerous symptoms that could lead to hospitalization or even death.

Treatment will most likely consist of [antiviral drugs](#). Immune modulators and monoclonal antibodies may also be used. Clinicians should consider potential drug interactions and adjust dosages or medication choices accordingly while monitoring patients closely.

Patients with obesity should be encouraged to maintain regular visits with their healthcare providers and [continue their obesity treatment](#) following recovery from the COVID-19 virus.

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Effectively Communicating with Patients

Discussing COVID-19

- Before bringing up the topic of COVID-19 with patients managing obesity, healthcare professionals should establish rapport by creating a comfortable and non-judgmental environment for patients.
- First, address the reason for the patient's visit.
- Then, ask open-ended questions to gauge the patient's understanding of COVID-19 and their specific concerns related to obesity.
- Finally, explain that individuals managing obesity are more susceptible to severe illness, hospitalization, and complications from COVID-19.

Discussing COVID-19 Vaccines

- Emphasize that the COVID-19 vaccines are safe, effective, and recommended to nearly all patients, especially those who are managing obesity and other metabolic disorders.
- Answer questions and acknowledge any concerns with empathy and patience, directing patients to fact-based [educational resources](#) on COVID-19, vaccines, and obesity.
- If a patient declines vaccination, respect their decision but encourage them to think about it further and to read your [recommended resources](#).

Discussing Obesity

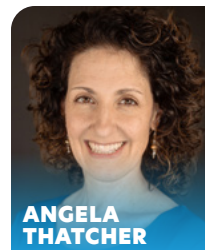
- Remember to always ask a [patient's permission](#) to discuss their weight.
- Use [person-first language](#) and avoid negatively charged descriptive words such as "fat" or "fat mass."
- Be cognizant of and sensitive to cultural differences surrounding weight and food.
- Individualize suggested behavior changes to patients, taking into account their health history, socioeconomic reality, and other barriers to lifestyle changes.
- If requested, recommend [reputable resources](#) and offer [referrals](#) to registered dietitians, nutritionists or weight management programs, and ensure that patients have access to the tools, support, and resources that they need to achieve their goals.

Learn more by listening to the entire AAPA **GOING VIRAL: COVID-19 and Obesity** podcast series.



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