



# Topic Brief: Health Insurance Coverage of Exercise Programs

**Date:** 11/26/19

**Nomination Number:** 893

**Purpose:** This document summarizes the information addressing a nomination submitted on 11/13/19 through the Effective Health Care Website. This information was used to inform the Evidence-based Practice Center (EPC) Program decisions about whether to produce an evidence report on the topic, and if so, what type of evidence report would be most suitable.

**Issue:** The nominator would like study or start an exercise program preferably delivered by a physical therapist or physical trainer for people with obesity, comorbid risk factors, and a physical injury. The nominator is requesting information about which exercise programs are currently covered by health insurance and have a billing code.

**Program Decision:** The EPC Program will not develop a new systematic review on this topic. The nominator does not express an interest in a product that is related to the core activity of the EPC Program. We identified related resources in the course of our assessment that might be useful.

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## Background

- According to the CDC the prevalence of obesity was 39.8% and affected about 93.3 million of US adults in 2015-2016. <sup>1</sup>
- Treatment for overweight and obesity include healthy eating, regular physical activity, weight management programs, weight loss medicines, weight loss devices, and bariatric surgery. <sup>2</sup>
- The Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans define regular physical activity as >150 minutes a week of moderate intensity aerobic activity. <sup>3</sup>
- The US Preventive Services Task Force recommends that primary care providers who identify obese individuals refer them to intensive behavioral interventions and healthy diet counseling for adults with obesity and other cardiovascular disease risk factors. Their recommendations are restricted to what is usually within the scope of a primary care office visit. <sup>4</sup>
  - The ACA provides coverage for obesity screening.

## Assessment Methods

We assessed nomination for priority for a systematic review or other AHRQ EHC report with a hierarchical process using established selection criteria. Assessment of each criteria determined the need to evaluate the next one.

1. Determine the *appropriateness* of the nominated topic for inclusion in the EHC program.

2. Establish the overall *importance* of a potential topic as representing a health or healthcare issue in the United States.
3. Determine the *desirability of new evidence review* by examining whether a new systematic review or other AHRQ product would be duplicative.
4. Assess the *potential impact* a new systematic review or other AHRQ product.
5. Assess whether the *current state of the evidence* allows for a systematic review or other AHRQ product (feasibility).
6. Determine the *potential value* of a new systematic review or other AHRQ product.

### Summary of Selection Criteria Assessment

Regular exercise is one of many treatments for people with obesity. The nominator wishes information about insurance coverage of exercise programs, which will vary by insurance plans. The nomination's focus would not be optimally addressed by the activities of the EPC Program.

AHRQ's EPC Program synthesizes existing research about the benefits and harms of interventions with the goal of helping consumers, health care professionals, and policymakers make informed and evidence-based health care decisions. The EPC Program does not perform primary data analysis or primary research.

### Related Resources

We identified additional information in the course of our assessment that might be useful.

- Information about Medicare coverage of gym memberships and fitness programs <https://www.medicare.gov/coverage/gym-memberships-fitness-programs>
- Jannah et al. Coverage for obesity Prevention and Treatment Services: Analysis of Medicaid and State Employee Health Insurance Programs. *Obesity* (2018) 26, 1834-1840. doi:10.1002/oby.22307
- Information from Medicaid about reducing obesity <https://www.medicare.gov/medicaid/quality-of-care/improvement-initiatives/reducing-obesity/index.html>

### References

1. Hales CM CM, Fryar CD, Ogden CL. . Prevalence of obesity among adults and youth: United States, 2015–2016. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics; 2017.
  2. Treatment for Overweight & Obesity. Bethesda, MD: National Institute for Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases; 2019. <https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/weight-management/adult-overweight-obesity/treatment>. Accessed on 26 November 2019.
  3. Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans, 2nd edition. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; 2018.
  4. Final Update Summary: Weight Loss to Prevent Obesity-Related Morbidity and Mortality in Adults: Behavioral Interventions. U.S. Preventive Services Task Force; 2018. <https://www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org/Page/Document/UpdateSummaryFinal/obesity-in-adults-interventions1?ds=1&s=obesity>. Accessed on 14 March 2019 2019
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**Conflict of Interest:** None of the investigators have any affiliations or financial involvement that conflicts with the material presented in this report.

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