

## Accommodating Bariatric Residents in Senior Care Facilities

Obesity is a growing public health concern in many age groups in the United States, including older adults. Nearly 31 percent of adults aged 65 and older were living with obesity in 2022, an increase of almost 4 percent from 2013.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, population data from 2023 show that about 20 percent of adults in each state are living with obesity.<sup>2</sup>

These rising numbers of adults with obesity support why it is essential for senior care leaders to ensure that their organizational risk management plans involve educating staff members about obesity/bariatrics and the possible injuries that may result, as well as maintaining systems to deal with any injuries.

Staff members at senior care facilities may be at a greater risk for injury when caring for bariatric residents who are mobility-dependent. To reduce potential injury and liability exposure, senior care facilities need (a) plans that support safe bariatric resident handling and mobility, (b) proper equipment and personal care supplies for bariatric residents, (c) appropriate spaces to accommodate bariatric residents (which may require renovations), and (d) adequate staff training programs related to bariatric care.

Delve into the following risk tips for high-level guidance on safely accommodating bariatric residents in senior care facilities.<sup>3</sup>

**1**

Develop an effective bariatric resident mobility and handling plan that addresses operational policies/procedures, resident assessment, communication, resident handling guidelines and algorithms, environmental considerations, equipment use and needs, staff training/education, and evaluation.

2

Plan for more bariatric residents than the organization currently serves when developing a facility plan. If planning any renovations, facility leaders should forecast the percentage of bariatric residents expected at least 5 years beyond the anticipated completion dates for the renovations.

3

Educate staff on the causes of obesity, increase their awareness of weight bias and stigma, and widen their perspectives on obesity treatments to enhance their empathy with bariatric residents and decrease any stereotyping. Reinforce that bariatric patients need quality and respectful care delivered in a safe manner.

4

Ensure that nursing staff members conduct a thorough assessment for any new bariatric resident upon admission to determine physical abilities and needs.

5

Train staff on transferring and repositioning bariatric residents for proper hygiene, pressure injury prevention, and proper body mechanics.

6

Ensure your facility has specialized equipment to provide quality care for bariatric residents and avoid serious safety risks to staff and residents (e.g., bariatric beds, lift systems, walkers, toilets, stretchers, chairs, etc.). Most standard equipment is rated for people who weigh less than 250–300 pounds. For more information on equipment needs, see [Essentials of a Bariatric Patient Handling Program](#) in the *Online Journal of Issues in Nursing*.

7

Choose mechanized powered devices for bariatric residents when possible, and look for equipment manufacturers whose products have higher weight limits on standard and bariatric models as well as longer warranties.

8

Modify bedrooms/bathrooms for bariatric residents to include larger toilets and larger shower chairs. Be sure toilets are floor installed versus wall-mounted to prevent possible injury.

9

Ensure appropriate personal supplies are available at your facility for bariatric residents, including larger hospital gowns, pants, housecoats, and slippers; larger blood pressure cuffs; and longer needles and catheters.

10

Be certain that bariatric equipment can fit through the standard-sized doorways and into elevators throughout your facility.

11

Work with your organization's medical director to include specialists, such as behavioral health professionals and physical therapists, in the ongoing care of bariatric residents.

12

Work with certified nutritionists/dietitians to develop a comprehensive meal and snack plan to assist bariatric residents in selecting more healthful food options.

## Resources

- [Health PEI: Long-Term Care Bariatric Friendliness Binder](#)
- [MedPro Group: Risk Resources: Ergonomics and Safe Patient Handling](#)
- [VHA Center for Engineering & Occupational Safety and Health: Bariatric Safe Patient Handling and Mobility Guidebook: A Resource Guide for Care of Persons of Size](#)

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## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Statista. (2024). *Percentage of adults aged 65 years or older in the U.S. who were obese from 2013 to 2022*. Retrieved from [www.statista.com/statistics/720268/elderly-obesity-united-states/](https://www.statista.com/statistics/720268/elderly-obesity-united-states/)

<sup>2</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2024, September 12). *New CDC data show adult obesity prevalence remains high* [Press Release]. Retrieved from [www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2024/p0912-adult-obesity.html](https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2024/p0912-adult-obesity.html)

<sup>3</sup> The risk tips in this publication are based on the following resources: Muir, M., & Archer-Heese, G. (2009, January 31). Essentials of a bariatric patient handling program. *The Online Journal of Issues in Nursing*, 14(1), Manuscript 5. Retrieved from <https://ojin.nursingworld.org/table-of-contents/volume-14-2009/number-1-january-2009/bariatric-patient-handling-program-/>; VHA Center for Engineering & Occupational Safety and Health. (2015, July). *Bariatric safe patient handling and mobility guidebook: A resource guide for care of persons of size*. Retrieved from [www.asphp.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/Baraiatrice-SPHM-guidebook-care-of-Person-of-Size.pdf](https://www.asphp.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/Baraiatrice-SPHM-guidebook-care-of-Person-of-Size.pdf)

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