

# Obesity

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*“Jack Sprat could eat no fat,  
His wife could eat no lean.  
Between the two of them,  
They licked the platter clean.”*

But for this Jack Sprat, the tables are turned – he doesn't eat the lean! Jack is 24 years old, 6'2" and weighs in over 440 pounds. Jack is a perfect example of morbid obesity, a condition of being too fat in a way that is dangerous to one's health. According to traditional thought, obesity has been defined as “a weight at least 20% above the weight corresponding to the lowest death rate for individuals of a specific height, gender, and age (ideal weight).”<sup>1</sup> Morbid obesity is a term applied to one who weighs over 100% of the ideal weight. Between obesity and morbid obesity are mildly obese, 20-40%, and moderately obese, 40-100% over the ideal weight. More recent ways of configuring obesity are: weight to height ratios using formulas; calipers to determine skin fold thicknesses, or comparing hip and waist circumferences. But however you break it down, Jack Sprat is dangerously overweight and needs to address the issue now – cross over the threshold, if you will, and deactivate the ticking time bomb he is holding. We know what the ticking time bomb is – his weight, but what is the threshold, or thresholds over which he must cross?

At first glance it would seem easy to answer that: lose weight. Jack would agree with you, and in fact that has been his goal for several years. To this end, Jack has started on several different weight-loss programs, however when the results are not apparent fast enough, he gives up and goes back to his old ways, adding more pounds in his frustration. As with so many others before him, Jack is looking at his weight as the problem, when in fact, it is the effect or result of a combination of underlying issues, and the thresholds he must cross are multiple: heredity, traditions and society,

Jack's issues do start in the past, a past that goes beyond his short lifespan. His family history shows not only the genetic tendencies to obesity, but also a generational ignorance of healthy eating and living. Jack also is a part of the "now" generation, a generation that has grown up with powdered, pasteurized, canned and frozen foods, TV dinners and fast food take-outs. TV, movies, videos and video games, cars and even buses and trains have all robbed this generation of a healthy work and active life-style. Plus, for Jack, poverty and ignorance have put a stigma on him so that society shuns or ignores him.

I last talked to Jack a little over a year ago, the day he was let go from his last job. He called me on his cell, and we met at a cafeteria-type eatery. I loved Jack. He was intelligent, witty and quite fun to be around – once you got used to his size, slight sweaty odor and lack of social graces. I wanted to help Jack, so while Jack ate, I talked. He gave me my opening as he started on his second plate when he smiled sheepishly over the first forkful and said, "I know I shouldn't eat so much, but I dunno, I'm frustrated, I guess."

"Jack, you know I love you," I cringed at my own words, knowing that was such an over-used pre-amble. He just nodded and shoveled more food. I tried again.

"Have you ever thought about talking to a Life Coach?"

"Nah," he said through food. "Them shrinks don't do me no good. Ya blubber into tissues for an hour, hand them a hundred bucks and go on about life just the same as before."

"That's a counselor, Jack." I said. "A Life Coach is very different. A counselor focuses on past events and aims to heal mental and psychological issues. A Life Coach looks for opportunities, not problems. They are much more result oriented, focusing on the present and looking toward the future." Jack just grunted, but I took that as a positive response and continued to talk.

“Life coaching is a one-of-a-kind relationship between you and your Coach. It’s designed to help you make the needed changes in your life in a way that you can cope with and continue for the rest of your days. Coaches recognize that everything is connected. They know that the past must be addressed in order to identify the thresholds you must cross over to be successful, but they don’t dwell on the past. To a Coach, the past is a tool used to release a person into the present and on to a healthy future.

“In addressing your issues, Jack, a Coach would first set you up with a doctor who specializes in weight loss. They would work together with you to establish a diet and exercise program for you, and would both monitor you carefully to make sure you lost weight and gained muscle tone in a healthy way. The type of obesity you suffer from, call morbid obesity, is a serious disease and needs to be treated properly. While the doctor may specifically address your genetics - that is hereditary disorders and misaligned genetic coding that cause the body to improperly dispose of – or not dispose of – fatty acids, the Life Coach, working with the doctor, can address some of the other issues that are a cause and can affect morbid obesity, including family traditions, your perception of society and how the people around you see you.”

By then Jack had plowed his third heaping plate and was going back for a second helping of dessert. I had to leave for another appointment. I felt sad for Jack and frustrated with him, and wondered if he would ever cross over that first threshold, let alone all the others that followed to get him to a healthy and happy life.

It has been a year, almost to the day, since I last saw Jack. This morning as I was strolling through the mall, I was stopped by a tall, heavysset, but still quite handsome young man dressed in a sharp, three piece suit. The abroad grin on his face almost split it in half.

“You don’t recognize me!” He chortled, and with that laugh I recognized Jack!

“Jack, you look awesome!” I said, my voice muffled as he embraced me in a huge bear hug.

“Wanna grab a bite to eat?” He asked, nodding toward the same eatery. I hesitated for only a second. As he heaped his plate with salads and all things nutritious, he began to talk about the last year.

Jack Sprat stepped over that first threshold soon after I last saw him. He found a Life Coach and a doctor who knew about obesity, and together the three of them sat down and mapped out a five year program for Jack to follow. Both doctor and Coach are actively involved with Jack, as is his wife and children, in getting him down to his goal weight of 210 pounds. He’s already a quarter of the way there! Not only that, he is a junior executive in an up and coming IT business, has a brand new car, and a third child on the way.

Jack will succeed. Oh, and he rewrote the poem:

*“Jack Sprat will eat not fat,  
His wife eats only lean.  
But, ‘tween the two of them,  
The platter is always clean!”*

## References

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