

Overcoming childhood obesity means addressing mom's weight issues as well

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The information gap and general lack of understanding of obesity's unique and disproportionate impact on women contributes to the challenges of the 65 million American women who are considered overweight or obese, said the Strategies to Overcome and Prevent (STOP) Obesity Alliance Task Force on Women at a meeting on Capitol Hill today. Through discussions with health experts and an extensive review of obesity prevalence research, the Task Force found women to be hit hardest by obesity - confounding efforts to turn the tide on the nation's obesity problem, especially in children.

"We rely on [women](#) to serve as the 'Chief Health Officer' for the family, but with more than a third being obese themselves, we're unlikely to break the cycle with children without finding ways for moms to overcome their weight problems as well," said Christine Ferguson, professor at The George Washington University and Director of the STOP [Obesity](#) Alliance. "What's more, achieving healthier weights for women, whether they are mothers or not, will mean a healthier society overall. Unfortunately, significant barriers stand in the way."

Ferguson was joined by Khaliah Ali, editor-in-chief of *WLS Lifestyles* magazine, president of My Program for Life and daughter of boxing legend Muhammad Ali, as well as representatives from the American Association of Diabetes Educators, Black Women's Health Imperative, National Council of La Raza's Institute on Hispanic Health, WomenHeart: The National Coalition for Women with [Heart Disease](#) and others to reveal the Task Force on Women's assessment of the key

barriers blocking progress. Overcoming them, they said, could help women fight the extra pounds that can lead to serious [chronic diseases](#) like diabetes and heart disease.

The STOP Obesity Alliance Task Force on Women identified the following four areas that have a significant impact on weight and obesity in women:

- The physiological, psychological, cultural and [socioeconomic factors](#) of obesity that disproportionately affect women as well as the unique impact of overweight and obesity in women at various points in their lives, including but not limited to puberty, pregnancy and menopause.
- Pervasive racial and ethnic disparities in obesity prevalence and health outcomes among minority women, particularly African-American, Hispanic and Native American women.
- Systemic, gender-based biases portrayed in the media and encountered in educational, workplace, social and health care environments, including a focus on redefining and maintaining healthy weight goals based on health rather than societal norms or unrealistic body image ideals.
- Expectations for women as caretakers and the role they play in influencing and shaping the health behaviors and decisions of their families, especially their children.

The Alliance's Task Force on Women includes nearly 20 influential health advocacy organizations and aims to promote discussion among decision makers to look at strategies that will improve the health of overweight and obese American women and their families. The Task

Force, a sub-group of the Alliance's membership of more than 40 consumer, medical, government, labor, business, insurance and quality-of-care organizations, includes the following groups: American Association of Diabetes Educators, American College of Sports Medicine, American Diabetes Association, America's Health Insurance Plans, American Heart Association, American Medical Women's Association, American Sleep Apnea Association, Binge Eating Disorder Association, Black Women's Health Imperative, Canyon Ranch Institute, HealthyWomen, National Association of Social Workers, National Black Nurses Association, National Council of La Raza, National Indian Health Board, Society for Women's [Health](#) Research and WomenHeart: The National Coalition for Women with Heart Disease.

"This is the first step down an important path - a path that we hope will reap significant and immediate benefits in reducing the risks and consequences of obesity for women and their families," said Ferguson.

Provided by Chandler Chicco Agency

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