

PRESS RELEASE

Obesity patients urged to continue treatment

Many European obesity treatment centres and clinics, forced to close due to COVID-19, are reopening again

October 1, 2020: Europe's leading scientific research organisation for obesity and its affiliated patient organisation are urging patients to continue their treatment and not to let it lapse because of fears about COVID-19.

The European Association for the Study of Obesity (EASO) and the European Coalition for People Living with Obesity (ECPO) say they are very concerned that people seeking treatment for overweight and obesity have either postponed or stopped seeking medical advice because of fears they may be putting themselves at risk.

The call comes as many treatment centres across Europe are reopening for consultations and treatment after being closed for up to several months because of the COVID-19 pandemic. In June, EASO reported that more than 98% of its Collaborating Centres for Obesity Management (COMs) had stopped or reduced in-person outpatient visits.

“Now is not the time to be giving up on treatment,” says Professor Jason Halford, Head of the School of Psychology, University of Leeds, and President Elect of EASO. It is now more important than ever that people living with obesity receive the medical attention they need.”

In many cases it is a matter of continuing with treatment which started before the pandemic began. For others this may be the time to seek help, especially as restrictions on regular exercise and outdoor activities has meant that many people will have experienced increased health impairment due to weight gain, he said.

According to a survey recently carried out by EASO among 48 Collaborating COMs in 19 European countries, more than 90% of centres are open again and many have started offering the option of virtual consultations by video or telephone. Almost all have also put in place additional measures to minimise risks to patients and staff, allowing centres to maintain high levels of social distancing and reducing the numbers of people in waiting rooms.

“Any patients who have not been able to maintain contact with their healthcare providers, and especially those on medication, need to consult their practitioners again as soon as possible to ensure that their health is properly monitored and that dosages are still appropriate,” says Vicki Mooney, Executive Director of ECPO.

Of the COMs that conduct or refer patients for bariatric surgery, nearly three quarters said they have started doing so again.

People with obesity are at high-risk for ill health without appropriate treatment says EASO. Obesity is a gateway to many noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) including diabetes, cardiovascular disease and several cancers, and people with obesity in general appear to have an elevated risk of hospitalisation, serious illness, and mortality. With the rising prevalence of obesity has come an increasing awareness of its impact on NCDs and vulnerability to communicable diseases.

“They are going to need all the encouragement and reassurance they can get to follow treatment again,” said Professor Halford.

An online leaflet *The Importance of Following Your Obesity Treatment* can be downloaded from the websites of EASO and ECPO at <https://easo.org/covid-19-and-obesity/> and <https://euroobesity.org/>.

Notes to editors:

The survey of EASO Obesity Collaborating Centres was conducted in September 2020

Further information on COVID-19 and obesity can be found in two position statements:

Obesity and COVID-19: The Two Sides of the Coin

<https://www.karger.com/Article/FullText/510005> July 2020

Obesity and COVID-19: A Perspective from the European Association for the Study of Obesity on Immunological Perturbations, Therapeutic Challenges, and Opportunities in Obesity

<https://www.karger.com/Article/FullText/510719> August 2020

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