
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute English

What is fat-shaming?

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This is not a word-for-word transcript

Neil

Hello. This is 6 Minute English from BBC Learning English. I'm Neil.

Neil

January is often the time when people make New Year's resolutions – things they want to start, or stop, doing in the new year. Have you made any resolutions for 2021, Georgina?

Georgina

Well, for a start, Neil, I'm definitely going on a diet! Over Christmas I really piled on the pounds with all that chocolate.

Neil

Yes! not to mention Christmas pudding! I'd already put on extra weight during lockdown, then even more over Christmas, so I definitely need to diet in 2021.

Georgina

It's curious that we both made resolutions to lose weight, isn't it! I mean, most people overeat a bit at Christmas, then diet in January.

Neil

What are you saying, Georgina? Do you think we're worried people will call us fat?

Georgina

It wouldn't be so surprising, Neil. After all incidents of **fat-shaming** are on the rise – that's what it's called when someone is criticised or humiliated for being fat.

Neil

In this programme we'll be asking where the attitudes behind **fat-shaming** come from. We'll be hearing how anti-fat attitudes are often implicit or unconscious.

Georgina

Hang on though, Neil. Having a second slice of Christmas cake is hardly the same as being fat, much less obese.

Neil

That's true, Georgina. The word **obese** describes a person who's very overweight, with a lot of body fat. It's the term for a medical condition, measured using BMI or the body mass index. It's on the rise in the UK. In fact, that's my quiz question – how many adults in the UK are affected by obesity? Is it:

- a) 1 in every 3 adults?,
- b) 1 in every 4 adults? or,
- c) 1 in every 5 adults?

Georgina

I'll guess, b) 1 in every 4.

Neil

Ok, we'll find out the answer later. As you say, Georgina, the word **obese** has a very specific meaning. Here's Professor Abigail Saguy talking about the term to BBC World Service's *The Why Factor*. Listen out for when the word, **obesity**, started to be used:

Prof Abigail Saguy

The term obesity was **coined** in the middle of the 20th century as a concerted effort by medical doctors to say: this is a medical issue, one over which we have authority and expertise.

Georgina

Professor Saguy says the term **obese** was **coined** in the mid-1900s, meaning it was invented or first used in a particular way.

Neil

It originally meant an individual medical problem; something to be discussed between patient and doctor. But over time **obese** has become a term of discrimination and abuse.

Georgina

Psychology professor, Chris Crandall, has been involved in Harvard University's implicit bias projects. Most famous for revealing racial prejudice, the tests also measure other kinds of biases, including weight.

Neil

Many of the beliefs we hold about other people are hidden from conscious awareness. So what goes through our mind, consciously or unconsciously, when we see very fat people? Here's Professor Crandall speaking to BBC World Service's *The Why Factor*:

Prof Chris Crandall

We tend to think, at least in the western world, of fat people as personal failures, as moral failures... People tend to think of fatness as an indicator of laziness, of over-indulgence, of a lack of **moral fibre**, an unwillingness to take hold of your own life. We, as everyday Americans and westerners in general, tend to think that it's a personal **attribute**, it's a thing that you do to yourself and as a result you are deserving of **scorn**.

Georgina

There is a commonly-held prejudice that fat people are responsible for their condition – because they're lazy, greedy, or lacking in **moral fibre** - the ability or determination to behave ethically or with self-control.

Neil

In the west especially, being fat or overweight is thought of as a personal **attribute** – a quality, characteristic or feature that someone has. The idea is that fat people just are the way they are, and have no-one to blame but themselves: they should just exercise more or stop eating...

Georgina

This leads some to treat them with **scorn** – a strong feeling of contempt or disrespect.

Neil

In reality of course, weight isn't just about individual choices. How fat you are is also determined by environment and genetics – up to 80%, in some cases.

Georgina

And anyway, even if it was under personal control, **fat-shaming** doesn't feel like the right way to help people lose weight.

Neil

So if it doesn't cause problems, maybe you can have a second slice of cake after all, Georgina.

Georgina

Thanks Neil, but I don't want to spoil my appetite for the quiz question you asked. Was I right about the number of UK adults affected by obesity?

Neil

What did you say, Georgina?

Georgina

I guessed, the answer was b) 1 in every 4 adults.

Neil

Which was... the correct answer! Fat is an issue affecting millions of adults in the UK alone, and with studies suggesting that obesity might be a negative factor linked to Covid 19, it's one that could affect millions more.

Georgina

Food for thought there, Neil. Now, let's recap the vocabulary, starting with **obese** – dangerously overweight as measured by the body mass index or BMI.

Neil

This term obesity was **coined** – or invented, to describe a medical condition, although many people nowadays consider it a personal **attribute** – a quality or characteristic.

Georgina

Fat-shaming is criticising and humiliating someone for being fat, or showing them **scorn** – feelings of contempt or disrespect.

Neil

Or it could also involve believing they lack **moral fibre** – the ability to behave correctly or with self-control.

Georgina

That's all for this programme, but to find out more about your own implicit biases based on race, sexuality or weight, search online for 'Harvard IAT' and take a test yourself. You may be surprised what you find out!

Neil

And to hear more topical discussion and vocabulary join us again soon at 6 Minute English, download the app at your usual app store and follow us on social media. Bye for now!

Georgina
Bye!

VOCABULARY

fat-shaming

criticising, humiliating or drawing attention to someone for being fat

obese

overweight in a way that is dangerous for health, as measured by BMI or the body mass index

coin (a word or phrase)

invent a new word or phrase or use it in a particular way for the first time

moral fibre

the ability or determination to behave ethically

attribute

a quality, characteristic or feature that someone has

scorn

strong feeling or contempt or disrespect