

How to Talk to Teens and Adult Patients About Weight



Studies show short, 3-5 minute conversations during routine visits contribute to patient behavior change. Explain you want them to lose weight to reduce their health risks and make them feel better.

1) Address the patient's chief complaint first, independent of weight.

Overweight patients most likely know they are overweight. They don't want health professionals to blame their problems on weight, but appreciate it being addressed if empathy and respect for their struggles is shown.

2) Open the discussion.

Find out if the patient is willing to talk about weight. Express concern: *Jane, I am concerned about your weight because I think it is causing health problems for you. What do you think about your weight?* Be sensitive about cultural differences regarding weight or food preferences. If applicable, assess for eating disorders.

3) Use non-offensive terms.

Patients prefer the terms, "weight" "excess weight" or "overweight." Do not use the words, "obese" "fatness" or "excess fat."

4) Decide if your patient is ready to manage their weight.

Ask *"What are your goals concerning your weight?" "What changes are you willing to make right now?" "What about your weight loss attempts is working?" "What is not working?"* Reassess at every visit.

5) Provide advice and support.

Help the patient set realistic goals. They want to know what to eat and how much physical activity they should be getting.

- Set a goal of 5-10% reduction in body weight (1-2 pounds per week), or weight maintenance.
- Refer patients to a Registered Dietitian or weight loss program.
- Give the patient Priority Health's HealthFit Discount program list.
- Ask them to keep a Nutrition Log of what they ate and how they felt. Is the patient eating because they are hungry? Or for an emotional reason such as anger, loneliness or stress?
- Give recommendations for physical activity that will not cause injury or aggravate joint problems.

6) Follow up!

When you see the patient again, note changes. Offer praise, discuss setbacks, set a new goal.