

Tips for GI Physicians to Start the Conversation with Patients about Overweight & Obesity from the American College of Gastroenterology

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Gastroenterologists can provide a valuable clinical service by becoming actively involved in helping their obese patients lose weight. First, and most importantly, educate the patient: inform them on the link between overweight and obesity and GI symptoms and illness. Most patients are unaware of the relationship. Let patients know that they have some control in their health. Share the idea that managing their health is their responsibility.

Once they understand and are willing to change, talk to patients about the obstacles they might face. You might ask:

- How did they get to their present weight?
- How do they feel about their weight?
- What are their weight and health goals?
- Do they want to change and are they ready to change?

Discuss their options and whether they have access for help in losing weight:

- Can they do it on their own?
- Do they have a partner who shares the same or similar goals (e.g., a friend, sibling, or spouse)?
- Do they have access to a gym or to weight loss programs such as WeightWatchers™?

It is essential to review these issues in a caring, supportive, non-judgmental fashion. Many overweight and obese patients feel discriminated against and get defensive when discussing their weight. It's also important to create a friendly environment and to develop a community to support your patients in your office. Time management issues can be supported by involving a PA/NP or nutritionist. GI Behavior modification support from a mental health care worker may help to overcome the psychological barriers to weight loss.

Using the American College of Gastroenterology Poster, "Obesity: Know Your GI Risks," show patients the BMI and waist circumference charts. Indicate where they fall on the grid and show them the target range for their weight. Encourage patients to set small goals of approximately 5 to 10 percent at a time.

Tools to Counsel Overweight & Obese Patients Available at www.acg.gi.org/obesity:

- **Food and Exercise diary** Studies have shown tracking meals and adjusting intake as they go along will help with weight loss
- **Guides to healthy eating at home and dining out** Educating the patients with healthy eating habits and setting up and stocking a healthy kitchen pantry
- **Calorie counts on common foods**
- **Tips on How to choose healthy restaurant and fast food options**
- **Calorie expenditure chart** to help burn off calories
- **Internet links to Additional Resources**

Principles of Effective Obesity Counseling

- Communicate empathetically
- Establish a patient-physician partnership
- Deliver health counseling effectively
- Be sensitive to bias against overweight and obese individuals

Strategies to Reduce Bias Against Overweight & Obese Patients

- Recognize that obesity is a chronic medical condition
- Improve your knowledge of nutrition, multi-disciplinary treatments and community resources
- Create a friendly office culture and atmosphere
- Treat the overweight and obese population with respect and support

Source: Adapted from "Communication and Counseling Strategies" American Medical Association 2003 Roadmaps for Clinical Practice, "Assessment and Management of Adult Obesity: A Primer for Physicians"