

Initiating Obesity Discussions

Many patients feel stigmatized because of their obesity, and weight-related discussions can be unwelcome, even between clinicians and their patients. Therefore it's important to ask patients' permission before addressing their weight.

There are different ways to get permission:

Start with a general question, then link the patient's weight to his or her health problems, as appropriate.

Examples:

Tell me why you've come here today.... Some of those issues, like your fatigue and back pain, may be related to your weight. Would you like to talk about how a weight management program could help?

Do you have any other health concerns that you'd like to talk about? ... Do you think your weight might be related to the loud snoring?

Refer to other clinical measures.

Examples:

Your body mass index is over 30, which usually means a person is carrying too much weight. This puts you at risk for some health concerns. Can we talk about your weight?

I know you've been frustrated with how your test results haven't really improved. I think a weight management program would help. Would you like to talk about it?

Simply ask.

Example:

Would it be all right if we discuss your weight?

Patients may still be reluctant to discuss their weight. If the patient is unwilling, make clear that he or she can always come to you if weight-related health problems become a concern in the future. Then note the patient's physical exam results in the chart and indicate the patient is not concerned about his or her weight at this time.

