

Keys to Success

Obesity carries substantial social stigma, and patients' perceptions of clinicians' judgment and empathy can affect their willingness to undertake and adhere to a weight management plan (1-4). Certain clinician behaviors are more likely to promote patient satisfaction, adherence, and understanding, including (5):

- Empathy
- Courtesy
- Friendliness
- Reassurance
- Support
- Encouragement
- Respect for patients' questions
- Explanation-giving
- Positive reinforcement

At the same time, word choice can have a negative impact on patients' perceptions of clinicians' attitudes about weight. Consider avoiding terms more likely to be unacceptable to patients (6):

Terms to Avoid	Acceptable Terms
Fatness Excess fat Large size	Unhealthy body weight Unhealthy BMI Heaviness Weight problem

Some patients may object to the words *obese* and *obesity*. Avoid using these words as labels and make it clear that *obesity* is the name of the disease, not the patient. This can help build understanding and improve communication.

Don't Say	Say
Obese people can't lose weight because of their disease.	You have obesity, which is a disease that makes it hard for you to lose weight.

References

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3. **Gudzone KA, Bennett WL, Cooper LA, Bleich SN.** Patients who feel judged about their weight have lower trust in their primary care providers. *Patient Educ Couns.* 2014;97:128-131.
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