GP Ten Top Tips:

Raising the Topic of Weight

Safe ways to introduce weight into a consultation without causing upset

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For further information about the RCGP clinical priority programme, please visit: www.rcgp.org.uk/clinical-and-research/clinical-priorities.aspx or alternatively, contact the CIRC team at circ@rcgp.org.uk
1. Always consider whether your patient's weight may be relevant both to future health and to the presenting complaint, and if he/she would benefit from active management.

2. Start with asking "How do you feel about your weight?", or "Do you keep an eye on your weight?". This avoids casting a judgement and gives the patient the opportunity to join the conversation if they wish without being defensive. You might be surprised that the patient has already lost some weight - if so, give encouragement. Follow this with "Is it something you would like to discuss further or get some support with?".


4. Check whether weight management is a priority for the patient right now. Would they gain more health benefits from stopping smoking perhaps? Should any mental health aspects be addressed first?

5. What goal is the patient heading towards?

6. For patients that are not ready to aim for weight reduction explain that taking active steps to avoid further weight gain is a worthwhile goal in itself. Regularly weighing helps with keeping weight stable.

7. Broaden awareness of the wide variety of health gains from improving lifestyle. Avoid focusing solely on BMI change. Improving fitness and dietary quality is valuable even if weight does not change significantly.

8. Consider the effect of changed eating and activity patterns on the family (especially children). Maternal dieting can have a negative effect on daughters' body image. Encourage the health professional to emphasise the benefits of "normalising weight". This avoids casting a judgement.

9. Refer non-complex patients to a local community-based weight-management service, as their first option, using Health Improvement Networks or local bariatric pathways.

10. Consider screening for eating disorder if you suspect psychological support may be needed. If so, offer to listen and consider psychological support. If you have any concerns, offer to screen for eating disorders.

11. Refer complex patients via local bariatric pathways.

12. Always consider whether your patient's weight may be relevant to future health and to the presenting complaint, and if they would benefit from active management.