

Understanding NICE guidance

Information for the public

Preventing obesity and staying a healthy weight

NICE advises the NHS on caring for people with specific conditions or diseases. It also advises the NHS, other organisations and the public on preventing ill health and promoting good health.

This booklet is about the prevention of obesity and staying a healthy weight, for people in England and Wales. It explains guidance (advice) from NICE (the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence) for health professionals, local authorities, schools, early years providers, employers and the public. It is written for people who want to know how to maintain a healthy weight, but it may also be useful for their families, carers or anyone else with an interest in obesity.

The booklet also aims to help you understand when you might need help and where you can go to get support. If you want to talk to someone about obesity, your GP, practice nurse, health visitor, school nurse or pharmacist should be able to help. There are examples of questions you could ask throughout this booklet to help you with this. Some sources of further information and support are on page 8.

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This booklet describes the advice in the NICE guidance on the prevention of obesity, including:

- how people can make sure they and their children stay at a healthy weight
- how health professionals, local authorities and communities, childcare providers, schools and employers should make it easier for people to improve their diet and become more active.

There is another booklet, called 'Treatment for people who are overweight or obese' (see page 8 for details), that describes the advice NICE has given on the treatment of obesity, including:

- how staff in GP surgeries and hospitals should assess whether people are overweight or obese
- what staff in GP surgeries and hospitals should do to help people lose weight
- care for people whose weight puts their health at risk.

For details about how to get copies of both booklets, see page 8.

Obesity

Obesity is a health issue. It can contribute to a range of problems, including heart disease, type 2 diabetes, osteoarthritis and some cancers. See page 6 of this booklet for information on how to check if you are a healthy weight.

How can you stop yourself from becoming overweight or obese?

Many things can affect your weight. But if you have a healthy diet and keep physically active then it's much easier to stay a healthy weight.

How can you eat healthily?

The NICE guidance says that a healthy diet is important for all the family, including children and young people. Following the advice below will help you stay a healthy weight.

- Base your meals on starchy foods such as potatoes, bread, rice and pasta, choosing wholegrain where possible.
- Eat plenty of fibre-rich foods such as oats, beans, peas, lentils, grains, seeds, fruit and vegetables, as well as wholegrain bread, and brown rice and pasta.
- Eat at least five portions of a variety of fruit and vegetables a day in place of foods higher in fat and calories.
- Choose low-fat foods.
- Avoid foods containing a lot of fat and sugar, such as fried food, sweetened drinks, sweets and chocolate. Some takeaways and 'fast' foods contain a lot of fat and sugar.
- Eat breakfast.
- Watch the portion sizes of meals and snacks, and how often you are eating.
- Avoid taking in too many calories in the form of alcohol.

How can you keep physically active?

Small everyday changes can make a difference. You don't have to join a gym or sports club (although it can help). Below is some more advice from the NICE guidance.

- Try walking or cycling to the shops.
- Avoid sitting for too long in front of the television, at a computer or playing video games. You could try gradually reducing how long you sit down in front of a screen by setting some time limits.
- Adults could try to build physical activity into the working day. For example, you could take the stairs instead of the lift, or go for a walk at lunchtime.

How parents and carers can help children and young people to keep to a healthy weight

Parents and carers are important role models for children and young people and can help them to stay healthy. The NICE guidance offers extra advice to help you keep your children at a healthy weight or, if necessary, to help them to lose weight.

- Ensure your children have regular meals, including breakfast, in a sociable atmosphere without distractions (such as watching television).
- Whenever possible, eat meals with your children.
- Encourage children to play games that involve moving around a lot like skipping, dancing, running or ball games.
- Try to be more active as a family, by walking or cycling to school and the shops, or going swimming or to the local park together.
- Encourage children and young people to participate in sport or other physical activities, and make the most of chances to do this at school.

Questions you might like to ask a health professional such as a health visitor, your GP or a nurse

- Why does it matter if I put on weight?
- Where can I find out more about being more active?
- Where can I find out more about healthy eating?
- Is there anywhere locally I can get advice on buying and cooking healthy food? Are there any groups I can join?
- Is there some written material (like a leaflet) about my options?

What help can you expect from local organisations?

NICE recommends that the following local organisations should take action to help you.

- **Nurseries and other services for preschool children** should make sure children are active during play time and regularly take part in other enjoyable physical activities. Children should also sit down together – and with adults, where possible – to enjoy regular healthy meals, free from distractions.
- **Schools** should ensure children and young people regularly take part in physical activities that they enjoy – and can also do outside school – as well as encouraging them to walk or cycle to school. Healthy foods and drinks should be promoted and children should eat meals (including packed lunches) in a pleasant, sociable environment.
- **Local authorities** should make it easier and safer for people to walk or cycle everywhere, for example, by making sure buildings are designed so that people can use the stairs, making streets safer and cleaner, and setting up cycling and walking routes. The NICE guidance also says local authorities should work with shops and caterers to make sure they encourage healthy food choices.
- **Employers** should make it easier and safer for people to walk or cycle to work, for example by providing showers and places to store cycles and encouraging people to use the stairs. If they offer food, healthy options should be promoted.

How to tell if you might need help (and what to do)

The NICE guidance recommends that, whatever age you are, if you think you may be overweight, you should get help to lose weight and stay a healthy weight. The guidance also encourages adults to check their weight or waist measurement regularly, or keep track of the fit of their clothes. You may need help if you know that your weight is gradually creeping up.

You can make an appointment to see your GP, a nurse at your GP's surgery or, if you're at school, your school nurse. You can also get advice from a pharmacist.

Parents or carers who are concerned about a young child can also make an appointment to see their health visitor. If their child is at school, they can ask to see the school nurse.

You can get information and advice from the organisations listed on page 8.

What sort of help can you expect?

Any of the healthcare professionals listed above should provide help and advice. If, after talking to one of them, you decide you don't want to take it any further at the moment, you can always make another appointment later on.

If you do decide to take up the offer of help, the healthcare professional should give you the encouragement you need, and keep in touch on a regular basis.

What happens during an appointment?

NICE recommends that the healthcare professional should:

- talk to you about the benefits of being physically active
- suggest how you could fit more physical activity into your everyday life, based on what you like doing and how easy it is for you to do it
- suggest how you could eat more healthily, based on your own likes and dislikes, and discuss how easy it is for you to buy food and prepare meals
- help you to come up with some realistic goals and give you some tips on how to achieve those goals (these might include, for example, how to cope in a situation where there is a lot of tempting sugary or high-fat food)
- provide you with written information and offer you ongoing support.

They may use a measure called body mass index (or BMI for short) to find out if you are overweight. This involves weighing you and measuring your height. Your BMI is your weight in kilogrammes (kg) divided by the square of your height in metres (m²). There's a BMI calculator on the NHS Direct website (www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk/interactiveTools/bmi.aspx).

Your waist measurement may also be taken. This is because, if two people have the same BMI, the one with the bigger waist measurement is more likely to develop health problems as a result of being overweight. If you are a man, your chance of developing health problems is higher if your waist measurement is more than 94 cm (37 inches), and higher still if it is more than 102 cm (40 inches). If you are a woman, your chance of developing health problems is higher if your waist measurement is more than 80 cm (31.5 inches), and higher still if it is more than 88 cm (34.5 inches).

If you are overweight, you should be offered help and support to lose weight. There is more information about this in another booklet on NICE's guidance called 'Treatment for people who are overweight or obese' (see page 8 for details).

If you are very muscular, your BMI may not give an accurate idea of whether you need to lose weight.

If you are of Asian background you may be at higher risk of some health problems related to being overweight or obese, so you may be advised to try to lose weight even if your BMI is below 25.

For a child, the parent or carer should be involved in any plans or advice drawn up to help the child lose weight.

If you are an adult and are thinking about joining a slimming club or using a weight-loss video or book, you should check that its advice is based on having a healthy diet and being more active. People should not be expected to lose more than 0.5–1 kg (1–2 lb) a week. If the advice is different from this, it is unlikely to help you lose weight for good. Your GP surgery may be able to tell you about local groups that can help.

Questions you might like to ask your healthcare team

- Are there any local organisations that could help me and my family to lose weight?
- Can you provide any information for my family or carers?
- As a carer, how can I help an older person (or a child) lose weight?

More information about obesity

The organisation below can provide more information. Please note that NICE is not responsible for the quality or accuracy of any information or advice provided by this organisation.

- Weight Concern, www.weightconcern.org.uk

NHS Direct online (www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk) may also be a good starting point for finding out more about preventing obesity and staying a healthy weight.

You could also look at these websites:

- the Food Standards Agency – www.foodstandards.gov.uk
- Government information on healthy eating – www.eatwell.gov.uk or www.5aday.nhs.uk
- Sport England – www.sportengland.org

Your local Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) may also be able to give you further information and support.

About NICE

NICE produces advice (guidance) for the NHS about preventing, diagnosing and treating different medical conditions. It also produces advice for local authorities and other public bodies, employers and the public on ways of preventing illness.

The guidance is written by independent experts including staff from the NHS, local authorities and other organisations, and people representing patients and carers. They consider the best available evidence, the views of patients and carers and the experiences of professionals working in the field. Staff working in the NHS and other public organisations are expected to follow this guidance.

To find out more about NICE, its work and how it reaches decisions, see www.nice.org.uk/aboutguidance

This booklet, a booklet called 'Treatment for people who are overweight or obese' and other versions of this guidance aimed at healthcare professionals, local authorities, schools and other organisations are available at www.nice.org.uk/CG043

You can order printed copies of this booklet from the NHS Response Line (phone 0870 1555 455 and quote reference N1153). For the booklet 'Treatment for people who are overweight or obese', quote reference N1155.