

## Promoting a positive office environment

From *Medical Care for Obese Patients*; NIDDK Weight Control Information Center  
<http://win.niddk.nih.gov/publications/medical.htm>

Using the following guidelines can improve patient care in your office. To create a positive office environment, review these guidelines with your medical and administrative staff.

### 1. *Create an accessible and comfortable office environment.*

- Provide sturdy, armless chairs and high, firm sofas in waiting rooms.
- Provide sturdy, wide examination tables that are bolted to the floor to prevent tipping.
- Provide extra-large examination gowns.
- Install a split lavatory seat and provide a specimen collector with a handle. Properly mounted grab bars are needed to enable a person to get up more easily. It is important to install floor mounted toilets and well-supported toilet bowls.

### 2. *Use medical equipment that can accurately assess patients who are obese.*

- Use large adult blood pressure cuffs or thigh cuffs on patients with an upper-arm circumference greater than 34 cm.
- Have extra-long phlebotomy needles, tourniquets, and large vaginal specula on hand.
- Have a weight scale with adequate capacity (greater than 350 pounds) for obese patients.

### 3. *Reduce patient fears about weight.*

- Weigh patients only when medically appropriate.
- Weigh patients in a private area that allows for confidentiality.
- Record weight without comments.
- Ask patients if they wish to discuss their weight or health.
- Avoid using the term obesity. Your patients may be more comfortable with terms such as "difficulties with weight" or "being overweight."

### 4. *Monitor obesity-related medical conditions and risk factors.*

- Conduct tests to assess type 2 diabetes, dyslipidemia, hypertension, sleep apnea, ischemic heart disease, and nonalcoholic steatohepatitis.
- Consider concerns of the extremely obese patient that may be overlooked such as lower extremity edema, thromboembolic disease, respiratory insufficiency (Pickwickian syndrome), skin compression (ulcers), and fungal infections.

5. *Offer preventive care services.*

- Allow adequate time during office visits for preventive care services.
- Recommend or provide preventive care services that are not impeded by the size of the patient, such as Pap smears, breast examinations, mammography, prostate examinations, and stool testing.

6. *Encourage healthy behaviors.*

- Discuss weight loss—as little as 5 to 10 percent of body weight—as a treatment for weight-related medical conditions.
- Emphasize healthy behaviors to prevent further weight gain, whether or not the patient is able or willing to lose weight.
- Encourage physical activity to improve cardiovascular health.
- Seek out professional resources to assist your patients and provide referrals to registered dietitians, certified diabetes educators, exercise physiologists, weight management programs, and support groups, as appropriate.
- Promote self-acceptance and encourage patients to lead a full and active life.