

Raising the subject of weight with patients

Being overweight is strongly linked to various health risks so it's important to discuss a patient's weight and possible risks as well as providing support to help them make lifestyle changes.

Raising the issue of a patient's weight can be difficult, though. *What if I offend the patient? What if they don't want to talk about their weight? How can I talk about a patient's weight when I struggle with my own weight?* These are all common concerns among healthcare professionals.

Asking for permission to weigh a patient can help to open a discussion. For instance:

'I see from my records that I haven't checked your weight recently, would you mind if I weighed you today?'

Using open questions, which avoid any hint of blame or judgement, can also help to start a discussion with patients around weight – for instance: *'How do you feel about your weight?'* *'What weight would you like to be?'*

Rather than telling the patient about their risks and what they should do, which may well make them feel criticised or blamed and so prevent an open conversation, explore their understanding of the relationship between weight and health conditions. Questions such as: *'What do you already know about weight and blood pressure?'* or *'Has anyone discussed the links between weight and fertility with you before?'* can be useful. Use them to find out what the patient already knows and seek permission to add to this if necessary.

Many health professionals struggle with their own weight and this can add a barrier to discussing weight with patients. Appropriate self-disclosure can be useful, and can mean the patient feels you're more able to empathise with and support them. For example: *'I understand that managing weight can be difficult – if it was easy I'd be a perfect size 12!...'*

Offer help and establish what the patient would like from you, rather than assuming, by asking:

'What help or support would you like from me?' It's possible the time isn't right for the patient, and if so acknowledge this and let them know you're there and your door is open: *'If you'd like to discuss this further or if I can provide any help at all please do make another appointment with me when you're ready.'*

About Slimming World

- Over four decades' experience in helping people to adopt a healthier lifestyle.
- Thousands of community based groups run by trained Slimming World Consultants who help members and their families make healthy changes.
- Healthy and family-friendly eating plan based on sound nutrition.
- Our members satisfy their appetites by enjoying everyday foods that are healthy, filling and low in energy density.
- Encourages a step-by-step activity programme in line with Government recommendations.
- In our groups members are supported to make easy, practical lifestyle changes to their shopping, cooking, eating and activity habits.
- Motivated by the shared experiences of the group and guidance from their Consultant, members are empowered to make long-term behaviour changes they previously found difficult.
- Advanced online programme for those who can't attend a group.

Find the Slimming World groups in your area at slimmingworld.co.uk

For more information on the health risks associated with raised BMI in adults and to order further copies of this resource please visit slimmingworld.co.uk/health

Photographers: Paul Buller and Gareth Morgans

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A guide for health professionals



Sensitively raising the issue of weight and signposting to effective support

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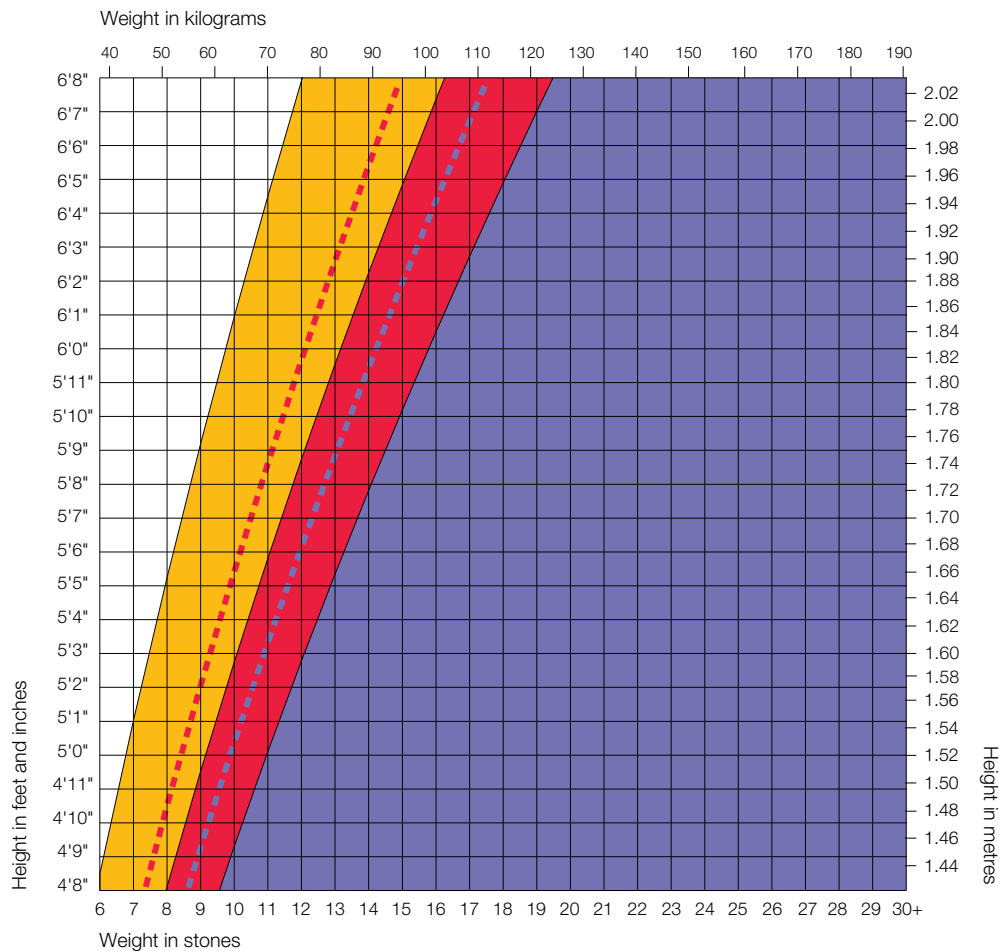
touching hearts, changing lives

Discussing a patient's weight can be difficult, yet it's an extremely important conversation to have. This adult weight range chart is designed to help you discuss a patient's weight and raise awareness of weight-related health risks in a sensitive and supportive way.

adult weight range chart

To use this chart, first you need a current measurement of the patient's height and weight. Using these, read off the chart below to see which colour range they fall into. The descriptions opposite explain what it means to be within each range and can be used in discussion with the patient.

The back page of the booklet provides further advice on raising the issue of weight with patients.



discovering your weight range

In this range, you are underweight:

- Intentionally trying to lose weight to reach and stay within this range can be unhealthy.
- You may not be eating enough food to supply your body with all the nutrients it needs. Being underweight can lead to problems such as osteoporosis and anaemia and can also affect fertility.

This is the healthiest range:

- You are at least risk of developing weight-related medical problems.
- Your health may not necessarily benefit from further weight loss and it's important not to aim to go below this weight range.

In this range you may be at risk of developing weight-related health problems:

- Making changes to your diet and becoming more active will help to reduce this risk and could also improve any existing health problems.

In this range your health is at greatest risk:

- Making changes to the foods you eat and becoming more active to lose weight and keep the weight off will significantly improve your health and fitness and help to reduce future health risks.

Please note: the point at which someone's health is at risk because of their weight varies between ethnic groups. It is recommended that Asian (South Asian and Chinese), black African and African Caribbean populations use the area between the dotted lines as an indicator for when their health may be at increased risk due to their weight (see the red range above), and the area to the right of the purple dotted line as an indicator that their health is at greater risk (see purple range).

NICE Public Health Guidance PH46.