

How can GPs help patients with obesity to lose weight?

[Professor Mark Harris](#), Director of COMPaRE-PHC, and [Dr. Catherine Spooner](#), Coordinator of COMPaRE-PHC, 2015

"Adults with overweight or obesity are seen regularly in general practice and it is important that clinicians can provide weight loss options for these patients."¹

The management of obesity can be complex and frustrating for both the patients and clinicians.

However, obesity can be managed successfully and even small amounts of weight loss are linked with lowered cardiovascular risk and delayed onset of chronic conditions such as diabetes.

The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) clinical management guidelines provide a helpful framework based upon the 5As for GPs to assist patients with obesity to effectively manage their weight (Figure 1).²

	BMI < 25.0 "normal"	BMI 25.0–29.9 "overweight"	BMI 30.0+ "obese"
	Standard care		Active management
ASK & ASSESS	Routinely assess and monitor BMI	Routinely assess & monitor BMI Discuss if BMI is increasing Screen & manage comorbidities	Routinely assess & monitor BMI Discuss health issues Screen & manage comorbidities Assess other factors related to health risk
ADVISE	Promote benefits of healthy lifestyle	Promote benefits of healthy lifestyle, including reduced energy intake, increased physical activity and behavioural change	Promote benefits of healthy lifestyle, including reduced energy intake, increased physical activity and behavioural change Explain benefits of weight management
ASSIST		Assist in identifying local programs that may be of benefit	Assist in setting up weight loss program: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advise lifestyle interventions • Based on comorbidities, risk factors and weight history, consider adding intensive weight loss interventions* • Tailor the approach to the individual
ARRANGE			Review and monitoring Long-term weight management

*Intensive interventions include very low-energy diets, weight loss medications and bariatric surgery

Figure 1. NHMRC 5As framework for weight management. Source: NHMRC Guidelines²

After measuring waist circumference and calculating body mass index (BMI), the first step is to discuss the patient's readiness to change their lifestyle behaviours. Advising on the benefits of weight loss needs to convey that there are lasting benefits to even small amounts of weight loss. Assistance will be more beneficial when this incorporates multicomponent approaches rather than relying on a single intervention. This can require referral to other health professionals, community-based programs or specialists. Lifestyle interventions that target nutrition, physical activity, and behaviour change are generally the first approach for providers when assisting patients with obesity to manage their weight. More intensive interventions such as very low energy diets and medication can be beneficial for some but require close monitoring and support. Bariatric surgery is currently the most effective intervention for those with severe obesity. Regardless of the weight loss treatment approach, follow-up is important. This should be frequent: fortnightly for the first 3 months of a weight-loss program with review and escalation in intensity if there is less than 1% decrease in weight.

Given the high demands upon the time of general practitioners, the practice nurse can also be involved in the assessment and management of overweight and obesity. Previous research has provided evidence of the benefits and cost effectiveness of practice nurse involvement in this area.³⁻⁵

References

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