

Guide to Successful Conversations on Key Topics

Talking to patients about nutritional therapy and physical activity

Having successful conversations with HCPs helps patients to be more successful with their weight goals. Through collaboration, counselling, and medical support, HCPs can help patients achieve clinically significant and maintained health improvements. Practicing practical communication strategies such as active listening, empathy, and encouragement can promote productive dialogue and healthy relationships with patients, as well as increase adherence and motivation.

Discussion surrounding weight management can be delicate, which makes word choices especially important. Certain words should be avoided and other words can have different implications in different contexts.

- Consider using more descriptive terms like “**healthy eating habits**” and “**physical activity routine**” instead of terms like “**diet**” and “**exercise**”
- Patients may feel more comfortable having a discussion about **weight** rather than about **obesity**, which is a term intended to describe a patient’s condition and could sound judgmental
- Talk about **activity** instead of **exercise**, because increasing activity levels can extend beyond exertion activities such as running
- Discuss **healthy eating plans, habits, and lifestyle** to indicate the healthy practice of chronic weight management instead of **diet** which implies a short-term restriction of foods

Terms to be avoided	Fat, fatness, heaviness, large size, weight problem
Terms to use instead	Weight, healthy weight

Talking about lifestyle habits with patients

Understanding your patients, their unique perspectives, experiences, and feelings about their current eating and activity habits is essential. As you create a plan for healthy eating and physical activity with your patient, it may be helpful to discuss the following topics.

General	Nutritional therapy	Physical activity
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Healthy eating and fitness myths• Previous strategies tried• Logistics (eg, time, cost)• Unrealistic expectations• Common challenges• Emotional, psychological, or physical barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Patient eating habits• Access to food• Portion management• Navigating special events• Keeping track of daily consumption	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Feasible types of activity• The duration of the activity• The intensity of the activity• The frequency of the activity• Patient routines for physical activity

Best practices to supporting healthy habits:

- **Start with realistic steps:** Help patients to determine realistic and achievable targets that can be measured over time
- **Keep it simple:** Focus on broad strategies and basic techniques for better nutrition and physical activity
- **Set expectations:** Make sure goals are attainable and realistic. You should also discuss a healthy weight-loss rate
- **Focus on progress:** Instead of focusing on setbacks, always discuss the progress your patient has made over time
- **Revisit long-term goals:** Throughout the process, connect the patient's long-term goals to actions they can take

Setting up actionable and sustainable changes

Action	Example phrases	Desired patient response
Create a plan for change		
Set the stage	It sounds as though you are ready to take some next steps. Many people find it helpful to make a specific plan about what they will do. Is that something you would be willing to do?	Okay, I guess I could do that...
Look for ideas	What do you like to do that brings you pleasure?	Well, I like to...
Envision the change	If you were to decide to do this regularly, what would that look like for you?	I was thinking about...
Specify the commitment	You look pretty happy about that. How far do you think you might go?	I will try to...
Verify the commitment	That sounds like a great plan. Just to make sure I am clear about what you plan to do, could you say your plan back to me?	[Restates the plan]
Assess patient commitment to change		
Gauge confidence level	Change can be daunting. On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is not at all confident and 10 is absolute certainty that you can do this, how would you rate your confidence to follow through on your plan?	I think I am at...
Acknowledge but sidestep barriers	I see. What do you think you could do to raise your confidence a bit more?	Well, I think I would feel more confident if...
Accept changes and reassess confidence	You really know yourself. That's great. With that change in your plan, what do you think your confidence level would be?	With this change, I could be at...
Affirm the plan	"You are really committed! I look forward to talking with you about how things are going at your next visit."	I feel good about the plan...
Reflect the change	I can see how important it is to you to be as healthy as you can be.	

References

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