

# CREATING A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT IN YOUR DIETETICS PRACTICE

Ensure your practice setting provides a welcoming space for patients of diverse body sizes. The strategies summarized below can help you create an environment to accommodate patients with larger body sizes, promote respectful weighing procedures, and offer weight-sensitive educational materials and resources.

## Accessibility

It is important that your practice setting be equipped to accommodate patients with higher weight. Two key factors that can promote accessibility for patients of diverse body sizes include:

### Space that Accommodates Patient Mobility

Large, sturdy chairs (preferably armless) or benches to accommodate patients with large body sizes

Doors and hallways that accommodate patients who use walkers or wheelchairs

### Appropriate Scale for Weighing

High-capacity scale that supports >500 lbs

Wide platform with handles for support during weighing

Accessible for patients with disabilities

Situated in a private area

Additionally, evaluate the tools and equipment used with patients in your office to ensure they are suitable for patients with higher weight. Consider the use of behavioral measures such as dietary intake, physical activity, or quality of life, for measuring the impact of interventions beyond changes in weight.

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## Sensitive weighing procedures

For many patients, being weighed creates feelings of anxiety, shame, and/or embarrassment. Additionally, patients may have had stigmatizing healthcare experiences in the past and feel uncomfortable being weighed. It is important to approach weighing procedures in a sensitive and respectful manner.

### Guidance for respectful weighing of patients:

Ensure scale is located in an area that offers privacy and confidentiality
Determine whether patient needs to be weighed at visit
Ask patient's permission to measure their weight
Offer option of blind weighing (facing away from scale)
Record patient's weight without judgement
Ask patient if they would like to be informed of their weight

*"May we measure your weight today?"*

*"Would you prefer to face away from the scale?"*

In some cases, patients may not wish to be weighed. Reasons for declining to be weighed can include shame and embarrassment, lack of provider trust, personal autonomy, and concerns about discrimination. If the patient does not want to be weighed, it's important to respect their decision without judgment. Focusing on behavioral changes that can improve health independent of weight loss can be beneficial and help mediate negative experiences related to being weighed.

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# Weight-sensitive educational materials and resources

Dietitians use a variety of educational resources when counseling patients, ranging from informational handouts and online toolkits to visual teaching aids such as food models. It is important to ensure that patient-facing materials are respectful and non-stigmatizing.

## What to Avoid

- ✗ Appearance-focused content (e.g., materials promoting thinness over health)
- ✗ Content that reinforces personal responsibility or blame for weight
- ✗ Written communication that uses insensitive language about weight
- ✗ Images that promote negative stereotypes of people with higher weight
- ✗ Diet-focused messages
- ✗ Models of fat (e.g., 3-D models to visualize 10lb of fat)

## What to Use

- ✓ Materials that emphasize healthy and mindful eating, rather than weight
- ✓ Content that recognizes the complex contributors to body weight regulation
- ✓ Written communication that uses weight-inclusive and respectful language
- ✓ Respectful images of people of diverse body sizes
- ✓ Evidence-based content on dietary behaviors
- ✓ Models of food portions

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## Resources for Respectful, Non-stigmatizing Imagery

When creating educational resources for your practice or engaging in educational outreach, it can be challenging to find images that depict inclusive and respectful portrayals of people of diverse body sizes. Several organizations have created image banks containing many examples of respectful, non-stigmatizing images of people with higher weight. These images are free, intended for educational and public use, and offer an important and much needed alternative to stock photo websites that often portray people with large body sizes in a stereotypical and negative manner. Please visit the websites of the organizations below for your visual communication needs in education, outreach, or research:

- [European Coalition for People Living with Obesity](#)
- [Obesity Action Coalition](#)
- [World Obesity Federation](#)
- [Obesity Canada](#)
- [UConn Rudd Center for Food Policy and Health](#)

*Examples of images in the Rudd Center's media gallery:*



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