

Reducing Weight Stigma in Dietetics Practice

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Dietitians are not immune to weight bias

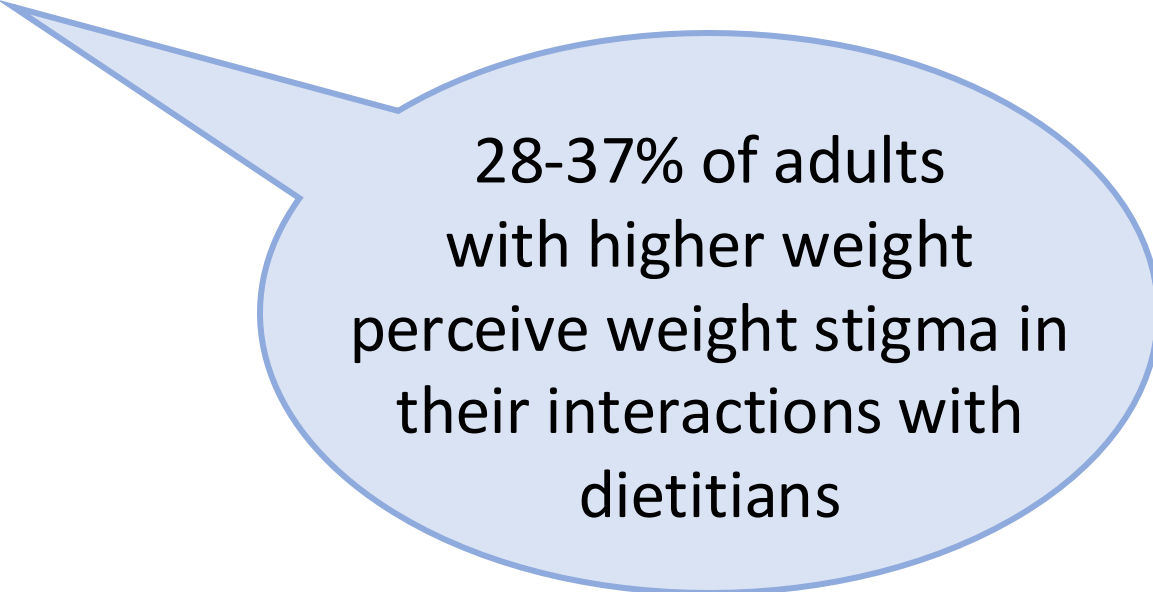
Dietitians
and Dietetic Students may:



Express weight-based stereotypes

Attribute obesity to laziness and
lack of willpower/discipline

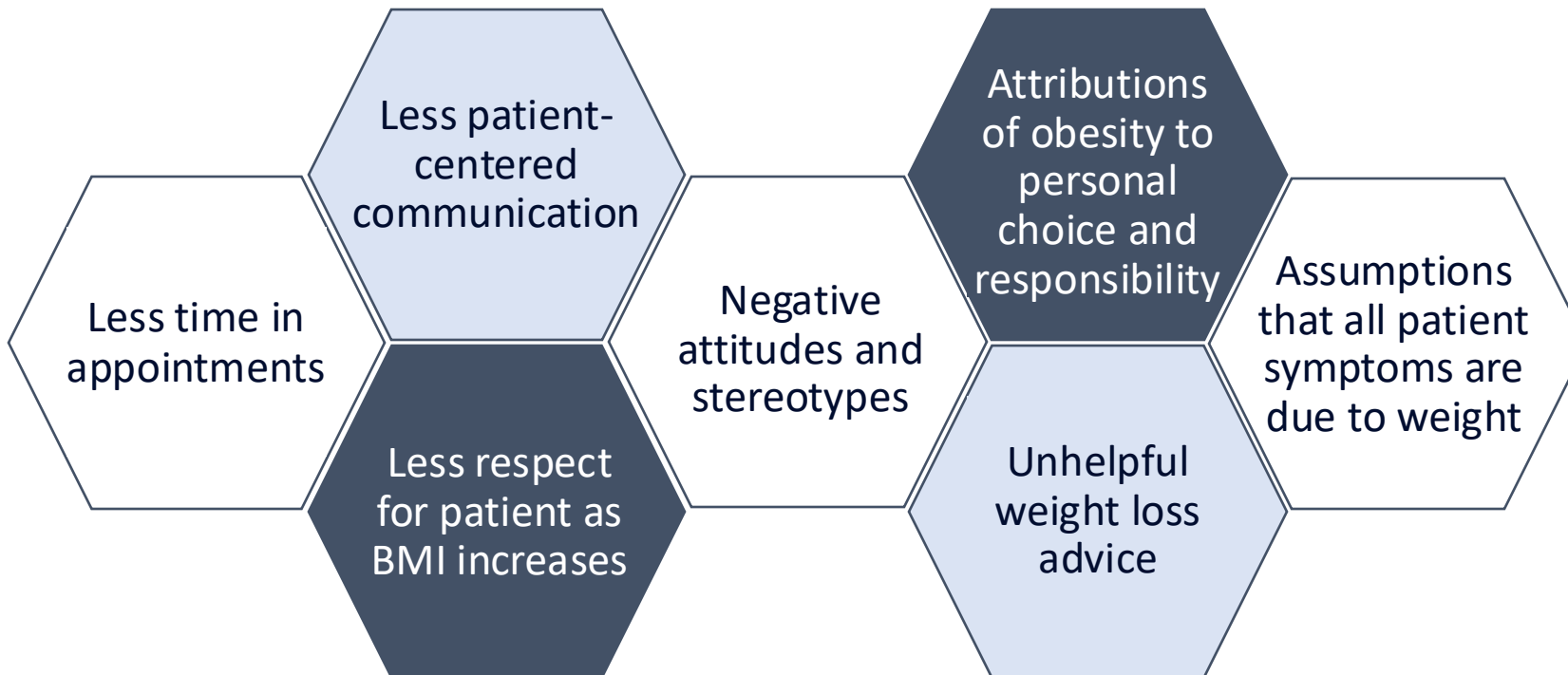
Have implicit weight bias



28-37% of adults
with higher weight
perceive weight stigma in
their interactions with
dietitians

Weight stigma impairs patient care

Patients with higher weight experience weight stigma in healthcare interactions with clinicians, including:



Amy et al., *Int J Obesity* 2006; Gudzone et al., *Patient Educ Counsel* 2014; Gudzone et al., *Obesity* 2013; Hebl & Xu, *Int J Obesity* 2001; Huizinga et al., *J Gen Intern Med* 2009; Phelan et al., *Obes Rev* 2015; Tilburt et al., *Patient Educ Counsel* 2019; Wong et al., *Patient Educ Counsel*, 2015.

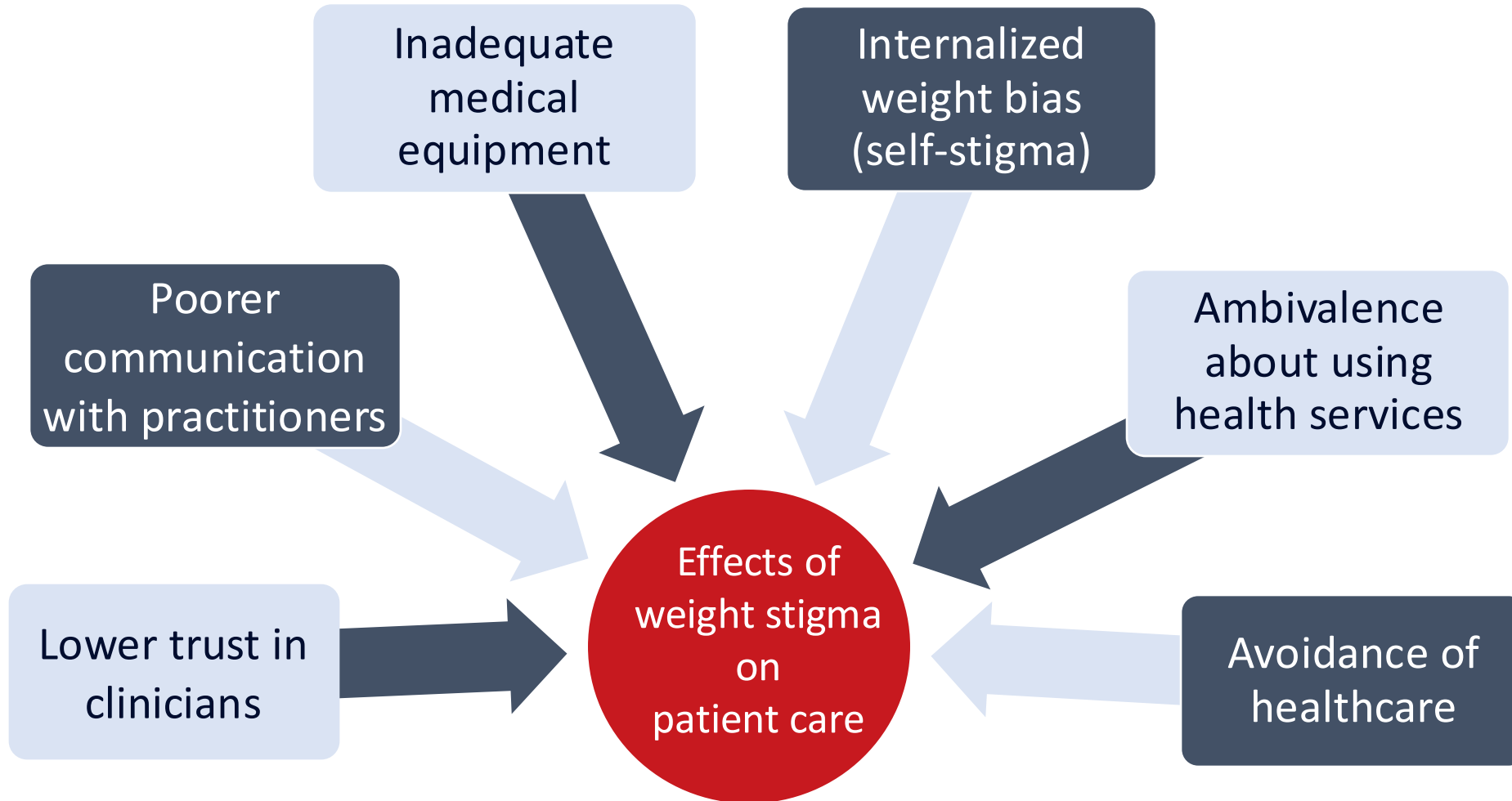
Patient perspectives of clinician interactions

Disrespectful communication
Stigmatizing and insensitive language
Judgment of eating behaviors or lack of weight loss
Dismissive of patient experiences and concerns
Assume patient has an unhealthy lifestyle
Assume patient isn't trying to improve health

With each increase in a patient's BMI category, there is approximately a 2-fold increased likelihood of perceiving stigma in healthcare.

Ferrante et al., *Obes Sci Pract* 2016

Weight stigma creates barriers in patient care



Strategies to eliminate weight stigma in dietetics practice

Best practices:

- ✓ Ask for and use patients' preferences for language about weight
- ✓ Respect patients' concerns and use non-stigmatizing communication
- ✓ Use motivational interviewing and patient-centered approaches
- ✓ Acknowledge social and environmental contributors to weight and health
- ✓ Ensure furniture and equipment can accommodate diverse body sizes
- ✓ Measure health behaviors to assess patients' progress beyond weight
- ✓ Include education of weight bias in training for students and professionals

Howes EM, Harden SM, Cox HK, Hedrick VE. Communicating about weight in dietetics practice: Recommendations for reduction of weight bias and stigma. *J Acad Nutr Diet.* 2021; 9:1669-1673.



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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 (armless) or benches to accommodate patients with large bodies.

Doors and hallways to accommodate patients who use walkers or wheelchairs.

Additionally, evaluate the environment to ensure they are suitable behavioral measures such as measuring the impact of

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RESPECTFUL AND PATIENT-CENTERED COMMUNICATION IN DIETETICS PRACTICE


Engaging in supportive and patient-centered communication is a key strategy for reducing weight stigma across multiple areas in dietetics. Practitioners working in dietetics play an important role in promoting compassionate and respectful communication in dietary counseling to effectively address the needs of people with obesity. Prioritizing patient-centered approaches, non-stigmatizing language about eating behaviors and body weight, and acknowledgement of patients' prior experiences of weight stigma can all help improve patients' experiences and quality of dietetics care.

Prioritize individualized, patient-centered approaches in dietary counseling

People with obesity should receive individualized, patient-centered dietary counseling that focuses on improving health rather than emphasizing weight loss alone. The 5 A's framework can be a useful guide for practitioners to use in dietary counseling:

Ask for the patient's permission to discuss their weight
Assess the patient's nutritional status and dietary patterns and needs
Advise the patient with personalized recommendations for dietary and nutritional changes
Agree on a plan tailored to the patient's needs through collaborative goal setting
Assist with resources and support to help the patient address challenges and achieve goals

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A patient's perspective of weight bias: Insights from Patty Nece

Patty describes what it is like to be a patient experiencing weight stigma in the healthcare setting.


[View Video](#) 14:18 mins



How weight bias hinders healthcare: Observations from Dr. Jaime Almandoz, M.D.

A discussion with Dr. Jaime Almandoz, M.D., Associate Professor, Department of Internal Medicine, & Division of Endocrinology, UT Southwestern Medical Center.

[View Video](#) 11:51 mins



The damaging impact of weight stigma

Professor Puhl discusses the psychological and physiological consequences of weight stigma.

[Listen to Podcast](#) 05:22 mins

MOTIVATIONAL INTERVIEWING

Health care professionals can use motivational interviewing to support patients of all body sizes in making health behavior changes. Through a goal-oriented, patient-centered, and interactive listening style, motivational interviewing aims to understand the patient's perspective, reduce patient ambivalence about change, promote patient motivation and confidence in achieving goals, and assist the patient to identify their own solutions.

Examples of health behaviors that can be addressed with motivational interviewing:

- Dietary patterns (e.g., food choices, portions)
- Fluid intake (e.g., water vs. alcohol)
- Physical activity (e.g., daily walking)
- Alcohol intake

Assessing Readiness

Before you raise the topic, establish rapport and trust, and health behavior change. After obtaining detailed information, use the following types of questions to assess readiness for change:

Readiness for Change

- How is your current behavior?
- How would you like to change?
- How do you feel about your current behavior?
- How ready are you to change, how ready are you to try?
- On a scale from 1-10, how ready are you to change, how ready are you to try?

What Words To Use

Research indicates that certain words to describe body weight may be perceived as judgmental and focusing blame on patients, which can in turn jeopardize important discussions about health. Many physicians report having little training on obesity and as a result, they may be reluctant to initiate conversations about weight or feel unsure about how to discuss weight-related health in ways that are empowering and supportive to patients. Using terminology that the patient feels most comfortable with can promote a more supportive and productive conversation.

Words to Avoid

- Obese
- Overweight
- Large
- Heavy
- Big
- Thick
- Plump
- Chubby
- Portly
- Stout
- Portly
- Stout
- Portly
- Stout

Preferences vary.

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PATIENT-CENTERED LANGUAGE

Talking about body weight can be a challenge, for both patients and providers. Certain words to describe body weight may be perceived as judgmental and focusing blame on patients, which can in turn jeopardize important discussions about health. Many physicians report having little training on obesity and as a result, they may be reluctant to initiate conversations about weight or feel unsure about how to discuss weight-related health in ways that are empowering and supportive to patients. Using terminology that the patient feels most comfortable with can promote a more supportive and productive conversation.

ACTIVE AND REFLECTIVE LISTENING TECHNIQUES

Effective listening is key to successful communication with patients. By engaging in active and reflective listening techniques with your patients, you can demonstrate your support and understanding of the patient, build trust, promote positive patient engagement, and foster motivation to change.

What is active listening and why is it important?

Active listening involves being fully engaged and attentive to the patient, receiving and interpreting their words, body language, tone of voice, and facial expressions to understand the fullest meaning of their message. When we engage in active listening, we can improve our interpersonal relationships.

Benefits of active listening for patient-provider interactions:

- ✓ Promotes trust and respect
- ✓ Eases patient fear and anxiety
- ✓ Helps to reduce misunderstandings and resolve conflicts
- ✓ Improves interpersonal relationships
- ✓ Enables better care

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