

10 questions to ask your doctor

- Pam Davies, bariatric nurse



How to talk with your doctor

Starting a conversation about obesity can be hard – even with your doctor. These ten questions can help to start a dialogue and take the first steps towards understanding what treatment options for weight management are available.

01

I want to lose weight. Could we schedule an appointment to help me develop a treatment plan?

Developing a proper plan takes time. You will need an appointment that leaves time for a conversation about your weight history and wishes for the future.

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What kind of treatment would you recommend to me, and why?

This is an important question, because no single approach works for everyone. This means that the types of tests, evaluations, and treatments will vary depending on your circumstances, health issues, and previous treatments.

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Can you help me to speak to an obesity treatment expert?

We cannot expect our doctors to be experts in everything. But we can expect them to know what they don't know, and when they should refer us to a specialist.

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What kind of treatment would you recommend to me, and why?

An obesity specialist will offer a number of different therapies, sometimes in combination. The goal is to pick the treatments that best address the reasons for your weight gain, like your biology, psychology and behaviour. Some options can include healthy eating, increased physical activity, anti-obesity medication or bariatric surgery. An ideal setup might be to team up with a registered dietitian and a behavioural health specialist.

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What kind of treatment would you recommend to me, and why?

Asking this question will tell you two things: the success rate of their approach to treating obesity, and whether they keep track of their patients during their treatment. This is important because you want a doctor that invests in long-term treatment.

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What do you see as realistic goals and how will these goals be supported?

Your doctor should help you to identify meaningful and realistic goals. But it's equally important to have support during the process. Your healthcare team might include a number of different specialists. Dieticians, psychologists and exercise physiologists can all be helpful, depending on your situation. Local and online support groups are also a great way to exchange experiences and stay motivated.

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How frequent will my appointments be?

The more frequent, the better. Appointments may be for support, accountability and to adjust treatment as necessary. They may not always be with a doctor, as appointments with support staff are also extremely valuable and should not be overlooked.

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How much will the treatment cost and will it be covered by my insurance or through the public health service?

The systems that cover medical costs vary a lot between countries. To avoid an unpleasant surprise, it's important to understand what your financial commitment will be from the start.

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What happens if this plan does not work?

Obesity is a complex chronic disease. To treat it successfully you need an individual treatment plan that fits your specific needs. This plan should include realistic goals, regular evaluations and a detailed program for you to follow. Depending on your progress, the treatment plan might need to be adjusted or just fine tuned. You need to know that your doctor has more than one approach – and more than one tool – to help you succeed.

10

Are you committed to partnering with me?

It might seem like a very direct question, but it's important that you feel that you are in good hands. You need someone who is interested in being a real partner on your journey, who stays in constant dialogue, and who shares the responsibility for your success.

Too many people are trying to manage their weight on their own – but it does not have to be that way. Obesity is a chronic disease and managing it is a lifelong process. Starting a conversation with your doctor or an allied healthcare provider can open up doors to treatments and therapies you might not have known about or otherwise considered.
