

PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

What Healthcare Professionals Can Do to be Accessible



Address Healthy Weight and Obesity

Disability and obesity are complex public health challenges, but ones that offer major dividends to our country if effective strategies are successfully applied. Healthcare professionals provide a vital role in implementing steps to help combat obesity among people with disabilities and assist them in achieving healthy weight and an improved quality of life.

What is Healthy Weight?

Healthy weight is the weight appropriate for a person's height and is based on a balance of calories consumed and calories used. People with disabilities may have difficulty achieving and maintaining a healthy weight. While most who are not at a healthy weight are usually overweight or obese, some are underweight. This brief addresses the issue of disability and obesity.

Considerations for Health Care Professionals

- **Understand the laws and regulations** designed to protect the rights of individuals with disabilities, such as assuring that health care facilities are accessible through features such as accessible entrances, doorways and door handles.
- **Identify how accessible medical equipment** such as wheelchair-accessible scales, accessible examining tables, mammography machines, or infusion chairs can be a part of one's practice.
- **Monitor weight development** of the patient consistent with CDC guidelines; in case of weight increase, inform patients, their families and care givers where appropriate, about the effects of being overweight on health, mobility, and quality of life.
- **Be aware of the importance of physical activity and healthy eating** in patients who have disabilities.
- **Be aware of, and advise patients and care givers about suitable exercise programs** such as, wheelchair sports groups, and nutrition/diet programs or resources to identify these programs within the region and make these available to people with disabilities.
- **Recognize barriers to healthy weight for people** with disabilities and advise patient and care givers on appropriate diet/healthy eating and physical activity options.

People with Disabilities and the Health Care Industry

Barriers related primarily to accessibility for people with disabilities may include:

- **Insufficient time** with the health care provider and staff;
- **Unclear or incomplete communication** between provider and patient;
- **Insufficient provider understanding** of disabling conditions;
- **Lack of accessibility to the building** and the necessary health facilities in the building; transportation to get to the health care site.

Did You Know?

- Disability affects more than 56 million people in the United States.
- There are many types of disabilities, such as those that affect a person's: hearing, vision, movement, thinking, remembering, learning, communicating, mental health, and social relationships.
- More than one-third of adults in the United States are obese, a 122% increase from 1980.
- Obesity is more common among people with disabilities than for people without disabilities and is an important risk factor for other health conditions.
- Adults with both disabilities and chronic conditions receive fewer preventative services and are in poorer health than individuals without disabilities who have similar health conditions.
- Annual health care expenditures associated with disability are estimated at \$400 billion.
- Obesity-related health care expenditures for adults are estimated at \$147 billion annually, with annual per person spending almost \$1,500 more for someone who is obese compared with someone with a healthy weight.

Children, youth and adults with disabilities experience disparities in many key health indicators like obesity, smoking, injuries and violence, and mental health. The problem is worsened when people with disabilities do not get access to health care services and information.

CDC funds activities to evaluate physical activity and healthy weight management for people with limb loss/limb difference, paralysis, and Intellectual Disabilities.

RESEARCH:

CDC conducts research that describes rates of obesity in people with disabilities, including type of disability. Further research, testing, and evaluation could lead to developing more valid and reliable ways to accurately assess, measure, and/or reduce obesity and its related health risks among populations with disabilities.

COLLABORATION:

Public health approaches that can reach large numbers of people in multiple settings—such as child care facilities, workplaces, schools, communities, and health care facilities—can help people make healthier choices.

For more information,

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