

Weight Management

A Practitioner's Guide

Dympna Pearson and
Clare Grace



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Weight Management

A Practitioner's Guide

Dympna Pearson RD

Consultant Dietitian and Trainer, Leicester

Clare Grace RD, PhD

*Obesity Specialist Dietitian, King's College Hospital NHS
Foundation Trust, London*



WILEY-BLACKWELL

A John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., Publication

This edition first published 2012
© 2012 by Dymphna Pearson and Clare Grace

Wiley-Blackwell is an imprint of John Wiley & Sons, formed
by the merger of Wiley's global Scientific, Technical and
Medical business with Blackwell Publishing.

Registered Office

John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, The Atrium, Southern Gate,
Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, UK

Editorial Offices

9600 Garsington Road, Oxford, OX4 2DQ, UK
The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19
8SQ, UK

2121 State Avenue, Ames, Iowa 50014-8300, USA

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Pearson, Dympna.

Weight management : a practitioner's guide / Dympna

Pearson, Clare Grace.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-4051-8559-2 (pbk.)

1. Obesity--Treatment. 2. Reducing diets. 3. Exercise therapy.

I. Grace, Clare. II. Title.

RC628.P36 2012

616.3'98--dc23

2012007651

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Wiley also publishes its books in a variety of electronic formats. Some content that appears in print may not be available in electronic books.

Cover Image: Mark Wragg/iStockphoto

Cover design by Steve Thompson

‘As with any chronic disease we rarely have the opportunity to cure, but we do have the opportunity to treat the patient with respect. Such an experience may be the greatest gift a doctor can give an obese patient.’

(From Stunkard A. Talking with patients. In: Stunkard A, Wadden T, editors. *Obesity: Theory and Therapy*. New York: Raven Press; 1993)

Foreword

With one in four adults in England now obese, and almost a third of children being either overweight or obese, it is easy to see why obesity is one of the most serious and complex health challenges we are facing in the UK today. The financial cost to the NHS, according to current estimates, is more than £4 billion, and yet obesity is a health issue that, paradoxically, attracts enormous public interest but still remains a worryingly low priority within medicine.

The costs to patient health are well documented, and we know that obesity is a contributing factor in cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, cancer and early death. But beyond that, the social and psychological cost to people with obesity can be enormous.

On a daily basis we are confronted with stories in the media telling us how fat we are becoming, and of the latest faddy diet, obesity 'miracle pill' or 'undeserving, greedy over-eaters' receiving NHS-funded gastric band operations.

With this continued negative focus, it is unsurprising that the perception remains that dealing with obesity is as simple as 'eat less and do more', when all evidence suggests that there is a multitude of behavioural, environmental and genetic factors that are responsible and that, most importantly, there is no magic bullet to 'cure' obesity.

Weight Management: A Practitioner's Guide is an excellent resource which identifies the various ways practitioners can help their obese patients take control of their own weight, while challenging them to confront their own perceptions of obese patients, and make changes to their practice accordingly.

Patients with obesity do not want to be defined by their weight, and the tools, guidance and resources within this book will help practitioners help place their patients at the centre of their own care from the very first consultation, allowing them to make effective changes that will improve their health and quality of life.

Dr Clare Gerada
Chair of the Royal College of General Practitioners

Acknowledgements

We wish to express our sincere thanks to the many colleagues who have helped us with this book, in particular Karen Allen, Cheryl Flanagan, Joanne Jones and Alison Macleod for their dietetic expertise and wisdom in reviewing early versions and their ongoing enthusiasm for its development. We would like to express our gratitude to Jill McMullan and Hannah Stewart for their help with analysing the food diaries.

Also, we wish to thank our families for their love, support, encouragement and endless patience.

Introduction

The aim of this book is to support and inspire practitioners working in weight management on how best to manage obesity, with a primary focus on lifestyle interventions in adults.

There are numerous obesity textbooks guiding us on the alarming rise in the prevalence, the causes and the consequences of obesity, and the theory and evidence on how it should be managed. However, surprisingly little detailed attention has been given to the specifics of clinical practice. What is the best way of raising the issue of overweight? When and how should we assess eating and activity behaviour? What is the most effective dietary treatment? These are just some of the many issues that arise when working with overweight patients, and which this book aims to address.

It brings together evidence of best practice, considers in detail the practical application of these approaches and provides clear answers to frequently encountered challenges. It is packed with practical tools and examples from practice and will guide you step by step through a framework of care for overweight and obese individuals.

Although we now know more about what works in weight management, the complexity and relapsing nature of obesity highlights the importance of further investment in training and research. Many health professionals report low confidence in their abilities to help obese patients and this is likely to have a negative impact on treatment outcomes, as well as the patient's and the practitioner's experience. Practitioners often relate poor confidence to inadequate training in the practical lifestyle recommendations and behavioural approaches to weight management. While this

book is not a substitute for high-quality skills training, it does provide an opportunity for practitioners to learn through self-reflection, gather additional knowledge and insight, and relate their experiences to those presented in practical examples. The book is also designed to allow practitioners to dip into relevant sections as the need or the practice-related question arises.

Much of the recent focus in obesity management has centred on prevention of overweight, particularly in children. This includes pre-conception and maternal nutrition, weaning and infant feeding, as well as pre-school nutrition. These interventions early in life are inextricably linked to the whole family, making it impossible to separate management of obesity from prevention. It is essential that sufficient focus is given to treatment of adults with established obesity, as their behaviours will be modelled within families and by children.

This book focuses on lifestyle treatment in adults, primarily one-to-one interventions, and does not address the complexities of childhood obesity, which merits its own dedicated practitioner guide.

The first section begins by exploring why treating obesity is so important and considers some of the key causal issues involved. It then explores practitioners' attitudes to obesity and how these might influence practice. This is followed by a brief overview of the evidence for lifestyle treatments, with additional information on drug and surgical interventions as adjuncts to lifestyle programmes. The second section guides the reader through the practical aspects of a patient-centred weight-management intervention and includes suggestions on how to adhere to best practice when time is limited. The ongoing challenge of weight maintenance and how to evaluate the impact of treatment are also addressed. Given obesity management is littered with myths and misconceptions, these are the

subject of the final chapter, and practical examples are provided to help the practitioner relate this information to their daily practice.

We hope you find this book helpful.

Note to readers

Throughout this book we have chosen to use the term 'patient' rather than 'client'. This reflects our belief that obesity is a chronic disease, and individuals often need support to manage, not only their weight, but also the associated diseases. We recognise that some readers may prefer to substitute the term 'client', particularly if working in non-health care settings.

1

Background Information

1

Why Treat Obesity?

'Obesity poses a threat on a similar scale to climate change' [1]

What is the scale of the obesity problem?

Obesity is one of the most serious and complex health challenges faced by the UK, Europe and most of the rest of the world. There has been a dramatic doubling in its prevalence over the last 25 years with most adults in England now overweight, and 1 in 4 obese (24% men; 25% women) [2]. Alarmingly similar trends have been observed in children, with 14.4% of 2-10 year olds obese in 2009 [3]. If current trends continue, future prevalence predictions are dire, with suggestions that 9 in 10 adults in England could be obese by 2050 [4].

This will have profound cost implications for the NHS and the wider economy. Current estimates for the NHS suggest obesity costs £4.2 billion/year, with wider economic costs (reduced productivity, loss of earnings, increased benefits) of £16 billion/year. If future prevalence predictions are accurate, this may rise to £10 billion/year and £50 billion/year, respectively [4].

A strong social inequality exists in the prevalence of obesity, although the factors responsible are unclear: in men, 18% are obese in social class I versus 28% in social

class V; in women, 10% are obese in social class I versus 25% in social class V [5]. Unfortunately, there is limited information on whether prevalence varies by ethnicity as most surveys only include small numbers from various ethnic groups. However, in 2004, a higher prevalence of obesity was found in black African, black Caribbean and Pakistani women compared to the general population [6].

Why does it matter?

Obesity is known to shorten life, is a risk factor for a range of major co-morbidities and can have profound effects on an individual's psychological and social well being. There are also wider economic and social consequences for society that make addressing obesity a compelling, albeit challenging, issue.

Obesity shortens life

Up to 13 years of life can be lost in obese men and up to 8 years in obese women [7]

Obesity and early death

Obesity increases the risk of dying early, particularly in men. In young adults there is a 50% greater risk of early death in those with body mass index (BMI) above 30 kg/m² compared to healthy-weight individuals [8]. Over the years there has been debate on the precise relationship between mortality risk and obesity. However, after appropriate adjustment for confounders, an elevated BMI is clearly linked with increased risk of premature death [9–11]. Obese white men aged 20–30 years with a BMI greater than 45 kg/m² are likely to lose 13 years of their life and for women with similar characteristics this can be up to 8 years [7]. The

link between mortality risk and BMI is greatest up to the age of 50 but does continue through to old age [12]. Risk can be moderated depending on the level of physical fitness, with suggestions that being overweight and inactive may account for up to 31% of early all-cause mortality [13].

Diabetes risk

Rapid rise above BMI 25 kg/m²

Longer obesity duration = greater diabetes risk

Even small increases in weight increase risk

Obesity and type 2 diabetes

Of all the associated co-morbidities, type 2 diabetes is the most strongly linked. Increasing fat mass, particularly abdominal/visceral obesity, is well recognised as a risk factor for the development of type 2 diabetes, due to its contribution to insulin resistance and beta cell dysfunction. The BMI above which diabetes risk begins to rise rapidly is surprising low, with a 3.6-fold greater risk in women with a BMI of 23–24 kg/m² compared to those with a BMI <22 kg/m², highlighting that this association is not the sole reserve of the severely obese [14]. For those aged 40–49 years with BMI >35 kg/m², risk of developing diabetes has been found to be almost 80 times higher than in those with a BMI of <22 kg/m² [15].

The longer the duration of obesity and weight gain, the higher the level of risk, with a 3-fold elevated risk in those who have been overweight for less than 5 years versus a 5-fold risk in those who have been overweight for more than 5 years [16]. Several studies have shown that individuals with small weight gains in early adulthood of ~5–8 kg have twice the risk of diabetes compared to those who have minimised

weight gain [15,17], emphasising the importance of preventing weight gain.

The risk of diabetes varies by ethnicity and is especially high in those of Asian origin. For each 5 kg weight gain, the risk of diabetes increased by 37% in whites, 38% in blacks but 84% in Asians.

Weight gain of 5 kg increases diabetes risk by 84% in Asians versus 37% in whites

Obesity and cancer

A BMI of $\geq 40 \text{ kg/m}^2$ has been associated with a 50–60% increased chance of developing cancer compared to healthy-weight individuals [9]. Obesity has been specifically implicated in cancer of the colon, endometrium and breast. A 1.5-fold greater risk of developing colorectal cancer has been found in women with a BMI greater than 29 kg/m^2 and in men with abdominal obesity (waist-hip ratio, WHR ≥ 0.99) [18,19]. Dietary factors (red and processed meats may exacerbate, while fibre and n-3 PUFA may protect) and physical inactivity (high activity levels may protect) have also been linked to the risk of colon cancer.

Obesity and cardiovascular disease

Obesity is a major modifiable risk factor for coronary heart disease. Its association with various atherogenic lipid and lipoprotein abnormalities is well recognised, including elevated total cholesterol and triglyceride, and lowered high-density lipoprotein cholesterol [20]. It is this link with atherogenesis, together with its negative impact on other coronary risk factors (hypertension, type 2 diabetes), that explains the strong positive association between the

incidence of coronary heart disease and obesity [21]. It has been estimated that as much as 70% of the coronary heart disease in obese women is attributable to overweight [22]. The distribution of adipose tissue is also known to be important, with central obesity increasing metabolic risk via a greater predisposition to dyslipidemia [23].

Quality of life

Research clearly illustrates that obesity has an adverse effect on health-related quality of life, with the magnitude of impairment increasing with increasing severity of obesity [24]. Conversely, improvements are reported after weight loss, although most research has explored changes after surgery rather than changes related to lifestyle approaches [25]. Obesity affects many aspects of physical and social functioning, sexual function and satisfaction, public distress and the ability to engage fully in the workplace.

Whether obesity leads to or is a consequence of depression has been hotly debated and there is a need for greater understanding of this complex relationship. A recent meta-analysis concluded that depression and obesity were reciprocal, with an increased risk of depression in the obese, and with depression being predictive for obesity [26].

Factors that increase the risk of obesity

Smoking cessation

Giving up smoking is commonly associated with an average weight gain of 7 kg [27], although this varies by age, lifestyle behaviours and socioeconomic status. There are a

number of possible reasons for this link, including: the removal of the appetite suppressing effect of nicotine; an improved sense of taste and smell leading to altered food preferences; swapping oral gratification from smoking to food; and behaviourally using food in the same way as cigarettes – for example, to deal with stress, boredom, self-rewards or as a means of socialising.

Although over 80% of those quitting smoking will gain weight, the health benefits of smoking cessation far outweigh the health risks of gaining weight.

To reach the same health risk as smoking one packet of cigarettes a day, the average smoker would need to be 55 kg overweight

As the evidence currently stands, the optimal timing of weight management and quit attempts is unclear. There is some concern that trying to control weight through lifestyle interventions while trying to quit smoking may negatively impact on the success of smoking cessation. Until it is clear that concurrent weight management does not lead to an increase in quit failure it may be wise to reserve weight-management interventions until smoking cessation has been successfully completed. However, there may be instances when an individual is so concerned about the possibility of weight gain that it adversely affects their motivation to stop smoking. Such situations require clinical judgment to determine whether individualised weight management alongside smoking cessation would be beneficial.

The provision of general advice ‘to avoid gaining weight’ while trying to quit smoking is generally ineffective and may hinder smoking cessation attempts. However, individualised weight-management interventions limit the extent of weight gain during the smoking cessation period, although the effect is small. The use of cognitive behavioural therapy and very low-calorie diets alongside smoking cessation treatments may be beneficial in reducing post-cessation

weight gain. Longer-term studies are required and it is recommended that these strategies are reserved for use in research settings [27].

The role of physical activity in managing weight during and after smoking cessation is a little unclear, although it may be important for improved weight control over the longer term [27,28].

Just advising people planning to stop smoking to avoid gaining weight is unhelpful and may prevent the attempt to quit.

There is insufficient evidence to determine the optimal timing of weight-management interventions and smoking cessation.

It may be most prudent to wait until after a successful quit attempt has been completed before considering weight-management interventions.

The decision to offer individualised weight-management interventions concurrently with a quit attempt should be made on an individual basis using clinical judgment.

Certain medications

There are certain medications known to increase the risk of weight gain and some of those listed below have been associated with up to a 10 kg gain over 12 weeks [29]. It may be helpful to discuss weight-management options in instances where the prescribing of such medications is necessary and an alternative is not suitable.

- atypical antipsychotics, including clozapine;
- beta adrenergic blockers, particularly propranolol;
- insulin, when used in the treatment of type 2 diabetes mellitus;
- lithium;
- sodium valproate;
- sulphonylureas, including chlorpropamide, glibenclamide, glimepiride and glipizide;
- thiazolidinediones, including pioglitazone;
- tricyclic antidepressants, including amitriptyline.

To date there is no evidence to suggest a link between oral combined contraceptives or hormone replacement therapy and weight gain [30].

Obesity and its causes

Obesity is commonly misconstrued as a self-inflicted condition, the causes of which are simple: eating too much and exercising too little. This is far removed from the complex nature of obesity revealed by science, and such misunderstandings tend to fuel weight-related stigma and do little to enhance obesity treatments.

Why do practitioners need a good understanding of obesity causes?

Developing a broad understanding of the complex biological and environmental factors involved in the development of obesity may have a number of important benefits:

1 Positive impact on the practitioner's attitudes to obese people (Chapter 2) Acknowledging obesity is not self-inflicted, and patients are often pushing back against strong biological tendencies and a challenging environment helps practitioners understand the challenge of weight management.

2 Improvement of the assessment process A better understanding of the factors involved in obesity development may lead to a more sophisticated assessment of these elements.

3 Improvement of the therapeutic relationship Discussing issues of predisposition can convey understanding and optimism. The information that some

people are more predisposed to obesity can be helpful for those who find it difficult to understand, and accept, why they find it harder to control their weight than others. It may allay feelings of self-blame, guilt and shame and is likely to convey a sense of support and understanding on the part of the practitioner.

Society views obesity as the result of personal failure (often lack of willpower) rather than influenced by environmental and genetic factors. Patients (and some health professionals) often view obesity in the same way. Summarising for patients what science tells us about the causes of obesity can counter these misconceptions, may allay guilt and self-blame, and can empower patients to address their obesity.

Consider this

If, as an obese person, a patient's starting point for managing their weight is this:

'I'm failing to lose weight because I don't have enough willpower. Why am I so useless at dieting when lots of my friends seem to have no difficulty? I know it's my fault and I need to do something about it but I don't know where to start. I suppose I just need to try harder but I'm not sure I can.'

Ask yourself:

- 1** What is the likely effect of their beliefs about the causes of their obesity on their self-esteem?
- 2** How confident are they likely to be about their ability to change behaviour and weight?
- 3** Is this a good place from which to begin a weight-management programme?

After discussion, the patient's attitude could be this:

'I've struggled with my weight for years and I've always blamed myself. Why couldn't I just eat less and do more exercise? It sounds so simple but I've failed at it time and time again. Now I understand that although some of it is clearly about me and the choices I make, it's not all my fault. That makes me feel so much better about myself and when I feel better about myself I eat less. Knowing that some people's bodies are much better set up to control weight is really helpful. I know my weight is always going to be something I need to take real care with, but I feel determined now to do something about this.'

What are the causes of obesity?