

Getting Started in Your Practice

Screening, prevention and treatment of obesity are not like many of the other medical conditions you may have dealt with in the past. Addressing this growing challenge may require new techniques for your office to learn; the words you use with your patients and families may need to be adjusted to reflect the sensitive nature of weight issues in our culture, and there really isn't a simple cure. All of this may make you wary of starting this work; however, our patients and their families are looking to us to help them. You don't need to take on the whole epidemic of obesity. There are organizations working in our schools, childcare centers and at the local, state and national levels to help our patients and families make healthy choices around physical activity and healthy eating. Here are a few steps you can take to get started.

- 1. Talk with your staff about their own attitudes and beliefs around healthy behaviors and weight issues (physical activity, healthy eating, etc).** Reinforce that this is an uncomfortable topic, filled with culturally sensitive behaviors, emotions, and opinions. Allow staff to explore their own experiences working with patients and families around weight issues.
- 2. Engage your staff.** Remember, it's a team approach – the whole practice doesn't have to implement these new approaches. However, it's important to engage not only the medical and nursing staff, but also the administrative staff. So, – your team could be one provider, one nurse and one secretary. They could try things out and then gradually spread this to the rest of your team.
- 3. Think about your environment.** Are there subtle messages your office sends out around healthy behaviors and weight?
 - Posters: Consider adding the 5-2-1-0 poster to your exam rooms (a great way to start a conversation).
 - Role modeling: Wear a pedometer, drink water.
 - Food: Serve healthy lunches at staff meetings, and be conscious of snacks and drinks that may be observed by patients and families.
 - See "Creating a Healthy Office Environment" for more tips!
- 4. Screen and document Body Mass Index (BMI) percentile for age and gender.**
- 5. Incorporate the 5-2-1-Almost None Patient Survey www.521almostnone.com into your office work flow.** This survey will help you focus on behaviors and not weight.
- 6. Talking with Patients and families.** This may require you to think differently about counseling patients. They don't necessarily need more information; they need to be guided to help them define their own priorities and willingness to change. (See Motivational Interviewing)
- 7. Explore your natural connections to the community — your voice matters!** There are many opportunities for you and your office team to advocate for healthy eating and physical activity in your community (schools, childcare centers, faith-based organizations, etc.) and at the state and national levels, advocating for policy changes. Think about where you spend your time, or are a member of a board or committee, and whether there are ways to model healthy behaviors.

