



# FAST FACTS



## Health Care Providers and Obesity Care

**OBESITY** is a complex chronic disease in which abnormal or excessive accumulation of body fat impairs health. Adult obesity rates have more than doubled since the 1980s — in the U.S. today, obesity affects over 42% of adults and 18% of youth.<sup>1</sup> Obesity and its related complications are major drivers of rising healthcare costs, diminished health-related quality of life, and the recent decline in U.S. life expectancy. This fact sheet is part of a series designed to provide basic information about the science of obesity and current strategies to address it.

### How Much Do Providers Know about Obesity Care?

**Research shows that an overwhelming majority of physicians believe that they have a full or partial responsibility to ensure that patients receive obesity counseling.**<sup>2</sup> However, one study of providers' knowledge of the current obesity treatment guidelines found that the majority of physicians are unaware of the latest recommendations.<sup>3</sup> The study found that out of 1,506 health professionals (family physicians, nurse practitioners, internists, and obstetricians/gynecologists):

- Only 16% of respondents indicated that obesity counseling should be provided twice a month for six months as the current guidelines suggest;
- Only 8% of respondents were aware of the current guidelines regarding prescription of pharmacological obesity treatments; and
- About one-third of respondents were aware of the current nutritional recommendations for obesity treatment and only about half of respondents were aware of the current recommendations regarding physical activity.

### Starting the Conversation

**According to the U.S. Preventative services Task Force, clinicians should begin behavioral interventions when treating a patient with a BMI of 30 kg/m<sup>2</sup> or over.**<sup>4</sup> The majority of clinicians surveyed believed that the provider and the patient share the responsibility for ensuring that the patient receives obesity counseling.<sup>2</sup>

- A majority of providers reported that a patient bringing up concerns about their weight would prompt them to initiate obesity counseling<sup>2</sup>
- The Mayo Clinic has provided a list of recommendations to patients who wish to start a conversation with their provider about weight.<sup>5</sup> These include:
  - Writing down a list of questions and concerns before the appointment
  - Speaking openly and honestly
  - Providing information about medical conditions and medications

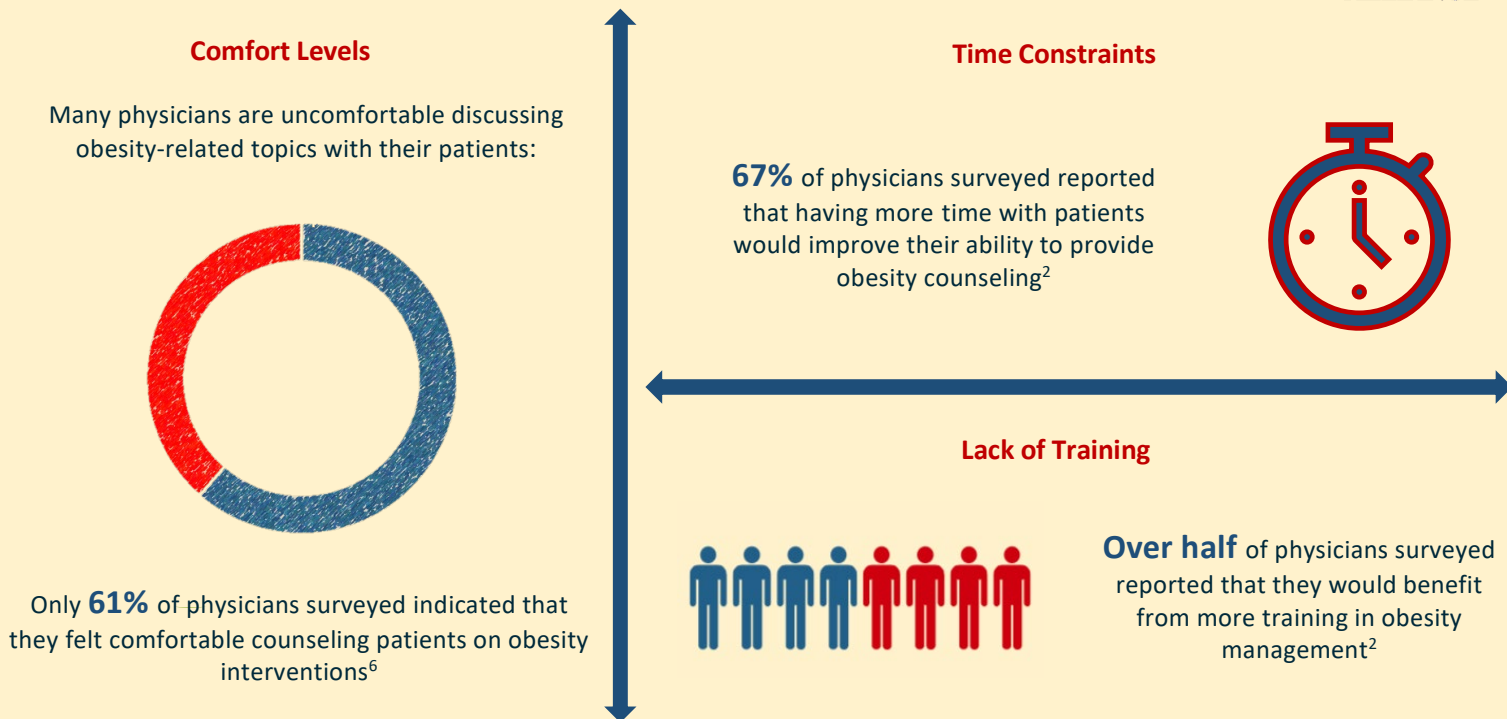
### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Many physicians are unaware of the current guidelines regarding obesity counseling and pharmacological treatment
- Treating obesity involves collaboration, shared decision-making, and communication between providers and patients
- Using patient-first and motivational language is important when it comes to discussing weight and weight loss

### LEARN MORE

*Read more about provider knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors*  
*STOP Obesity's Why Weight Guide for Providers*

## Barriers to Effective Obesity Counseling



## How Do Health Care Providers Discuss Obesity?

A recent study found that **19% of patients surveyed would avoid future medical appointments if they felt that their doctor used stigmatizing language during a conversation about their weight.**<sup>7</sup> This finding indicates that language is important when it comes to provider-patient conversations about obesity care.

- The Mayo Clinic recommends that providers use both people-first and motivational language when discussing weight with their patients<sup>8</sup>
  - The term “unhealthy weight” has been shown to be more motivating than the term “obesity” which many consider stigmatizing
  - Patients who have been diagnosed with obesity should be considered “patients with obesity” rather than “obese patients”
- Because over half of providers surveyed reported using the term “obesity” when discussing weight with patients, there is room for improvement when it comes to provider sensitivity

## REFERENCES

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