

PRESS RELEASE

New NICE guideline calls for urgent action to stem the rising tide of obesity in England and Wales

The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) has today issued the first ever national guideline addressing both the prevention and treatment of obesity in adults and children. The guideline contains wide ranging recommendations, not just for the NHS, but also for schools and early year's providers, local authorities, employers and town planners. They include:

- Local authorities should work with local partners, such as industry and voluntary organisations, to create safe spaces for physical activity, addressing as a priority any concerns about safety, crime and inclusion, by:
 - providing facilities and schemes such as cycling and walking routes, cycle parking, area maps and safe play areas
 - making streets cleaner and safer, through measures such as traffic calming, congestion charging, pedestrian crossings, cycle routes, lighting and walking schemes
 - ensuring buildings and spaces are designed to encourage people to be more physically active (for example, through positioning and signing of stairs, entrances and walkways).
- Schools should address their environment and ensure that the ethos of all policies help children and young people to maintain a healthy weight, eat a healthy diet and be physically active. This includes policies relating to building layout and recreational spaces, catering (including vending machines) and the food and drink children bring into school, the taught curriculum (including PE), school travel plans and provision for cycling.
- Diet changes and exercise, supported by behaviour change, should be the first line treatment for adults who are overweight or obese, followed by drug treatments if lifestyle interventions are unsuccessful.

- Healthcare professionals should give people advice on maintaining a healthy weight that includes:
 - Making being physically active such as walking, cycling, swimming, aerobics or gardening a part of everyday life
 - Eating five portions of fruit and vegetables a day
 - Avoiding foods that are high in fat and sugar
- Interventions for children who are overweight or obese should first address lifestyle within the family and in social settings. Drug treatments are recommended only if there are physical comorbidities (such as orthopaedic problems or sleep apnoea) or severe psychological comorbidities.
- Bariatric surgery is recommended as a last resort for adults with morbid obesity if strict criteria are fulfilled and all appropriate non-surgical measures have been tried but have failed to achieve or maintain adequate, clinically beneficial weight loss for at least 6 months.
- Bariatric surgery may be considered, in exceptional circumstances, for young people who have gone through puberty if they meet the strict criteria set out in the guideline.

Professor Peter Littlejohns, Clinical and Public Health Director at NICE and Executive Lead for this guidance says: “Obesity is the most serious threat to the future health of our nation. Its risks are as serious as smoking and urgent action is needed to tackle this problem now. For the first time we have brought together all the people that can help solve the obesity problem – not just health professionals, but also local councils, employers and schools – to produce a piece of work that sets out the steps we must take as a nation in order to tackle the obesity epidemic.”

Professor Jim McEwen, Emeritus Professor in Public Health and Honorary Senior Research Fellow, University of Glasgow who chaired the groups that developed the guideline says: “The guideline contains recommendations to improve the care of people with obesity setting out clearly what treatments should be offered to people with obesity and in what order. This guideline is about supporting and enabling health professionals and others to take full advantage of opportunities to improve health, not just with new treatments, but also public health interventions. All health professionals, schools and local authorities have a role to play.”

Dr Ken Snider, Director of County Durham and Tees Valley Public Health Network says: “Tackling the obesity epidemic isn’t just about treating people who are already obese, it’s also about helping people to avoid becoming overweight in the first place. So in this guidance we have taken a dual approach which includes both prevention and treatment. Everyone has a part to play, so we are recommending action by individuals, schools, local

authorities, urban planners and employers to make it easy for us all to be physically active. Our schools should give children and young people a good start in life when it comes to healthy eating habits and activity, and our local authorities and employers should make it easy for us to continue this approach in our communities and workplaces as adults. We recommend an integrated approach to the obesity problem – action must be taken now to stop the epidemic and to ensure better health and wellbeing for us all and for our children.”

Professor John Wilding, Professor of Medicine and Honorary Consultant, University Hospital Aintree, University of Liverpool says: “Some of the treatment options we are recommending in this guideline such as offering anti-obesity drugs, and in extreme cases, surgery, to children will be seen as highly controversial. But it is right that the NHS is given the go ahead to take radical action when faced with such a major threat to the health of our children. With early intervention and appropriate advice however, these radical measures will be unnecessary.”

Suzanne Lucas, consumer representative says: “The UK is second only to the USA in terms of the numbers of people that are overweight or obese. The guideline is to be welcomed as it contains a range of recommendations aimed directly at individuals to help them change their behaviour if they want to improve their long term health. I would encourage everyone to read the lay version of these guidelines and take action now, before it is too late.”

Ends

Notes for editors

About NICE

1. The guidance documents are available on the NICE website at www.nice.org.uk from 00.01 on 13th December or on request from the NICE press office.
2. The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) is the independent organisation responsible for providing national guidance on the promotion of good health and the prevention and treatment of ill health.
3. NICE produces guidance in three areas of health
 - public health – guidance on the promotion of good health and the prevention of ill health for those working in the NHS, local authorities and the wider public and voluntary sector
 - health technologies – guidance on the use of new and existing medicines, treatments and procedures within the NHS
 - clinical practice – guidance on the appropriate treatment and care of people with specific diseases and conditions within the NHS.