

# Assessing and Managing Obesity in Older Adults

Obesity management requires an individualized, holistic approach that addresses this patient population's unique needs and risks. This guide provides practical tools to facilitate shared decision making and personalize care for your older patients.

## 1. Initiate

**Obesity can be a sensitive and difficult topic to discuss with older patients. It is important to ask for permission when opening the conversation:**

*"Would it be alright if we discuss weight and how it might be connected to overall health today?"*

Be prepared that they may not be ready to have the conversation today – respect their readiness and leave the door open to revisit it down the road.

## 2. Assess

**Once they are comfortable proceeding with the conversation, consider asking them about their personal goals:**

*"How do you feel your weight is currently affecting your day-to-day life and the activities you enjoy most?"*

### Personal Goals

Weight loss may not be appropriate for every older adult. Take time to identify the specific health and functional outcomes that matter most to the patient.

### Diagnostic & Risk Evaluation

BMI and waist circumference are foundational diagnostic tools, but clinicians must consider age-related nuances when evaluating obesity in older adults.

#### WAIST CIRCUMFERENCE

Age-related fat accumulation tends to be intraabdominal. Using waist circumference may be a more accurate diagnostic tool than using BMI alone.<sup>1,2</sup>

#### BODY MASS INDEX (BMI)

BMI is often less accurate for older adults because it may not reflect age-related changes in muscle and fat. Weight loss intervention should aim to preserve lean mass.

Refer to professional society guidelines for clinical implications of waist circumference and BMI.

### 3. Personalize

**Focus the conversation on collaborative goal setting and management, ensuring the patient feels like an active partner in the process:**

***“What matters most to you right now: mobility, energy, joint pain, or independence?”***

The goal of managing obesity in older adults is to maximize fat loss while preserving lean mass to prevent complications, improve function, and enhance quality of life.<sup>1,2</sup>

**When lifestyle modifications alone aren’t sufficient to meet patient-identified priorities, discuss personalized pharmacological treatment plans<sup>3</sup> that may have the potential to improve mobility, alleviate joint pain, and support overall quality of life.**



#### References

1. McKee AM, Morley JE, Feingold KR, et al. Obesity in the Elderly. In: Endotext [Internet]. South Dartmouth (MA): MDText.com, Inc.; 2000. September 2021. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK532533/>.
2. Sundaresh S, Saliba S, Ziyadeh F, et al. Managing obesity in older adults. Cleveland Clinic Journal of Medicine. November 2025;92(11):686-692.
3. Jensen MD, Ryan DH, Apovian CM, et al. 2013 AHA/ACC/TOS Guideline for the Management of Overweight and Obesity in Adults: A Report of the American College of Cardiology/American Heart Association Task Force on Practice Guidelines and The Obesity Society. Circulation. November 2013;129(25 Suppl 2):S102-S138.