



## Physicians urged to join war on obesity

Today's issue of the Archives of Internal Medicine includes an article titled "The Escalating Pandemic of Obesity and Sedentary Lifestyle" -- a call to action to physicians to become actively involved in reversing the growing epidemic of obesity in America.

The article provides detailed guidelines that many physicians may soon use to determine if their patients have a healthy body weight and to work with overweight patients.

**Question:** What criteria will physicians use?

**Answer:** A weight-to-height ratio called body mass index (BMI) is one criterion. Physicians following these guidelines will measure waist circumference. Heavier body weight in combination with a larger waistline will trigger weight-loss prescriptions rather than a casual comment to lose weight.

**Q:** What are the cutoff values for being classified as overweight?

**A:** Those with a BMI higher than 25 are considered overweight and in need of a "prescription" to increase physical activity and make changes in their diets. Those with a BMI

over 30, or a BMI over 25 plus waist size over 40 inches (men) or 35 inches (women) will be given similar recommendations and referred to a nutritionist for assistance with weight loss.

### Calculating BMI

*BMI equals body weight in kilograms divided by height in meters squared. Some examples:*

	25 BMI	30 BMI	35 BMI
5 ft	128 lbs	153 lbs	179 lbs
5-ft-6	155 lbs	186 lbs	216 lbs
6 ft	184 lbs	221 lbs	258 lbs

*To save your brain for other challenges, the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute's Web site - [nhlbisupport.com/bmi/](http://nhlbisupport.com/bmi/) - offers a BMI calculator.*

**Q:** Are the new proposed guidelines for weight loss realistic, and will they work for everyone?

**A:** The new guidelines recommend losing between a half-pound and two pounds per week. This translates into decreasing food intake by about 500 calories per day or increasing exercise by 500 calories per day or adjusting both diet and exercise to equal a

500-calorie deficit per day.

The specific guidelines will depend on a person's level of obesity and whether he or she has related health problems. For those with a BMI around 30 who fail to lose 10 to 15 pounds in three to six months, the guidelines recommend a discussion of drug therapy to battle the fat demon. For patients with a BMI over 35, the doctor may discuss surgical approaches.

**Q:** What will a typical weight control "prescription" likely include?

**A:** Practical tips on how to increase physical activity and decrease caloric intake.

**Q:** Are there alternatives?

**A:** Last week, the "Health Options" column reported on how a strong genetic predisposition to obesity can make fitting into standard body weight guidelines like waging a war with your genes. Next week, "Health Options" will explore an alternative view of weight management called "Health at Every Size." Some health professionals believe this approach may be more appropriate for those with genetically based obesity.

Alan Titchenal, Ph.D, CNS and Joannie Dobbs, Ph.D, CNS  
are nutritionists in the Department of Human Nutrition, Food and Animal Sciences,  
College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources, UH-Manoa.  
Dr. Dobbs also works with the University Health Service.