

# Getting Started in Your Practice

Screening, prevention, and treatment of obesity is not like many of the other medical conditions you may have addressed 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 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 level 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<sup>st</sup> 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<sup>nd</sup> 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 the team.
  
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Think about your environment.** Are there subtle messages your office sends out around healthy behaviors and weight? (In the Toolkit under the tab - *Office Tools*, there are resources to help you create a healthy office environment).
  - **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.
  
- 4<sup>th</sup> Start screening and documenting Body Mass Index (BMI) percentile for age/gender.** (In the Toolkit under *Provider Tools*, there are resources to help you start implementing BMI percentile for age/gender screening in your office).

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**5<sup>th</sup> Incorporate the Healthy Habits (5-2-1-0) survey into your office work flow.** This survey will help you focus on behaviors and not weight. (In the Toolkit under – *Provider Tools*, there are copies of the 5-2-1-0 surveys – one for parents to fill out with children ages 2-9 and one for children ages 10-18 to fill out themselves).

***“A simple parent questionnaire and a simple slogan 5-2-1-0 gives the provider an entry into this difficult topic of obesity and provides neutral ground for discussion with parents.”***

– Deb J. Ganem, MD - Pediatrician in Nashua, NH.

**6<sup>th</sup> 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 helping them define their own priorities and their willingness to change. (In the Toolkit under *Provider Tools*, there are resources for you and your staff to use to learn more about these techniques: ASK-Don’t Tell and Effective Communication with Families).

**7<sup>th</sup> Hand out the patient and family tools one at a time** – based upon the patient’s and family’s areas of interest. (In the Toolkit under *Patient Tools*, there are a number of handouts on everything from 5-2-1-0, to why breakfast is best to the importance of sleep).

**8<sup>th</sup> 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 level 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.

As your practice thinks about working these tools and 5-2-1-0 messages into your office please know we are here to support you in your implementation. Please email: [infoletsgo@mmc.org](mailto:infoletsgo@mmc.org) for more information.