

# Unhelpful weight messages

## In healthcare settings

Healthcare should be a place of safety, support, and healing. However, for many people living in larger bodies, interactions with healthcare providers can sometimes feel invalidating, distressing, or even harmful.

This handout is designed to help you understand and respond to advice received in healthcare settings. It may also be useful for clinicians who wish to reflect on their practice and foster more inclusive, compassionate care.

### What are unhelpful weight messages?

Unhelpful weight messages may include:

- Being told your health concerns are solely due to your weight, without thorough assessment.
- Receiving unsolicited advice to lose weight, regardless of your reason for seeking care.
- Feeling judged, dismissed, or not taken seriously because of your body size.
- Experiencing discomfort due to inadequate equipment or seating in clinical spaces.

These experiences can lead to feelings of shame, avoidance of healthcare, and reduced trust in providers.

### Why do these messages occur?

Many healthcare professionals are trained in environments where weight is viewed primarily through a biomedical lens. While intentions may be well-meaning, messages can be influenced by:

- Society can have negative stereotypes about people based on their weight.
- Incorrectly thinking that weight is entirely within personal control.
- Relying too much on BMI as a health indicator.
- Lack of training in weight-inclusive care.



### The impact of these messages

Research shows that weight stigma in healthcare can lead to:

- A delay in having conditions accurately diagnosed
- Poorer health outcomes.
- Increased psychological distress, including anxiety and depression.
- Reduced engagement with healthcare services.
- Internalised shame and disordered eating patterns.

### What can you do as a patient?

#### 1. Validate Your Experience

It's okay to feel hurt, frustrated, or confused. Your

experience matters, and you deserve respectful care.

#### 2. Prepare for Appointments

- Write down your concerns and goals beforehand.
- Bring a support person if helpful.
- Ask for weight to be discussed only if relevant and with your consent.



#### 3. Advocate for Yourself

You might say:

- "I'd prefer to focus on my symptoms rather than my weight today."
- "Can we explore other possible causes for this issue?"
- "I'd like to discuss health behaviours rather than weight loss."

#### 4. Seek Weight-Inclusive Providers

Some clinicians specialise in weight-neutral approaches. These providers focus on behaviours, not body size.

### Tips for healthcare providers

- **Ask Permission:** "Would it be okay to talk about your weight today?"
- **Use Respectful Language:** Ask people what language they prefer.
- **Focus on Function and Wellbeing:** Prioritise focusing on health-related behaviours (i.e., sleep, movement, nutrition,) rather than on weight.
- **Challenge Assumptions:** Avoid attributing all symptoms to weight. Explore all possible causes.
- **Engage in Training:** Seek professional development on weight stigma and inclusive care.
- **Check Your Space:** It is important that your space is inclusive for all people. This can include having accommodating seating and healthcare equipment (e.g., scales, blood pressure monitors) that are inclusive for all body shapes and sizes.

### Final thoughts

Everyone deserves compassionate, evidence-based healthcare. By understanding the impact of weight stigma and advocating for respectful care, you can take steps toward healing and empowerment.

If you are engaging in treatment at CCI, you are welcome to talk to your clinician about your experiences of unhelpful weight messages in healthcare settings. Your clinician can help you deal with the distress these messages can cause; and can help you plan for how to deal with these messages when they occur.