

Chapter 5

Going for an MoT

(How a trip to the doctor's can help you to achieve your weight-loss goals)

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1 Assessing your fuel intake



1 Obesity is one of the fastest growing medical conditions in the UK. In 1980, only 6% of men were clinically obese. Now, as many as 21% of UK men fit into the obese category¹.

2 There are a number of possible reasons.

- Firstly, we have all become less active. The birth of the computer age has meant that we can all enjoy a wide variety of home-based entertainment, in the comfort of our armchairs. The popularity of digital television, DVDs, video game consoles and the internet has resulted in fewer people taking regular exercise. This means that, on average, people are now burning fewer calories than ever.

- Secondly, high-fat convenience foods such as pizzas, burgers, chips and deep-fried chicken meals have become extremely popular. These foods are now part of the nation's staple diet, and their cheap, super-size portions mean that, on average, people are now consuming more calories than ever.

3 Bearing this in mind, it is not difficult to understand why so many people are now overweight.

4 The simple facts are:

- If you take in more calories than your body needs, you will put on weight.

Conversely:

- If your body uses up more calories than you take in, you will lose weight.

5 Put simply, a calorie is the amount of energy that is contained within a food. The higher the number of calories, the more energy that is locked away inside it.

6 Unfortunately, by judging portion size alone, it is very difficult to tell how many calories a particular food contains. Certain foods (eg, chocolate) are very calorie-dense, meaning that even a small portion is very high in calories. Other

foods (eg, vegetables) are calorie-sparse, meaning that even large portions are not likely to result in substantial weight gain.

Strange but true

There are more calories in a small (50 gram) bar of chocolate than there are in three bananas.

7 To get a true picture of the number of calories in a food, it is important to read the food's nutrition label.

8 This will not only provide information about the calorific value of 100ml/100g of the food (or a typical serving size), but will also usually tell you:

- *The amount of protein (in grams).*
- *The amount of sugaring and non-sugaring carbohydrates (in grams).*
- *The amount of saturated and unsaturated fat (in grams).*
- *The amount of fibre (in grams).*
- *The amount of salt [sodium] (in grams).*

Calculate your body mass index (BMI)

This is simply your weight in kilograms, divided by the square of your height in metres:

$$\frac{\text{Weight (kg)}}{\text{Height (m)}^2}$$

Example:

Joe weighs 70.5 kg, and is 1.82 m tall. His BMI is therefore:

$$\frac{70.5}{1.82 \times 1.82} = \frac{70.5}{3.3124} = 21.3$$

What the results mean

BMI	Weight Status
Below 18.5	Underweight
18.6 to 24.9	Normal
25.0 to 29.9	Overweight
30.0 and above	Obese

2 The importance of regular maintenance checks

1 If you are prone to putting on weight, you should make regular checks to ensure that your weight is not getting out of hand. Even losing small amounts of weight can have a significant positive impact on your overall health. For example, losing some excess weight will substantially reduce your chance of contracting cancer and heart disease².

2 If you think you will find it difficult to lose weight on your own, your doctor is ready, willing and able to help you achieve your weight-loss goals. When you visit your doctor for the first time, he or she will probably run a series of tests. These tests are rather like an MoT, as they tell the doctor all he needs to know about your excess fat levels and the way they are affecting your overall health.

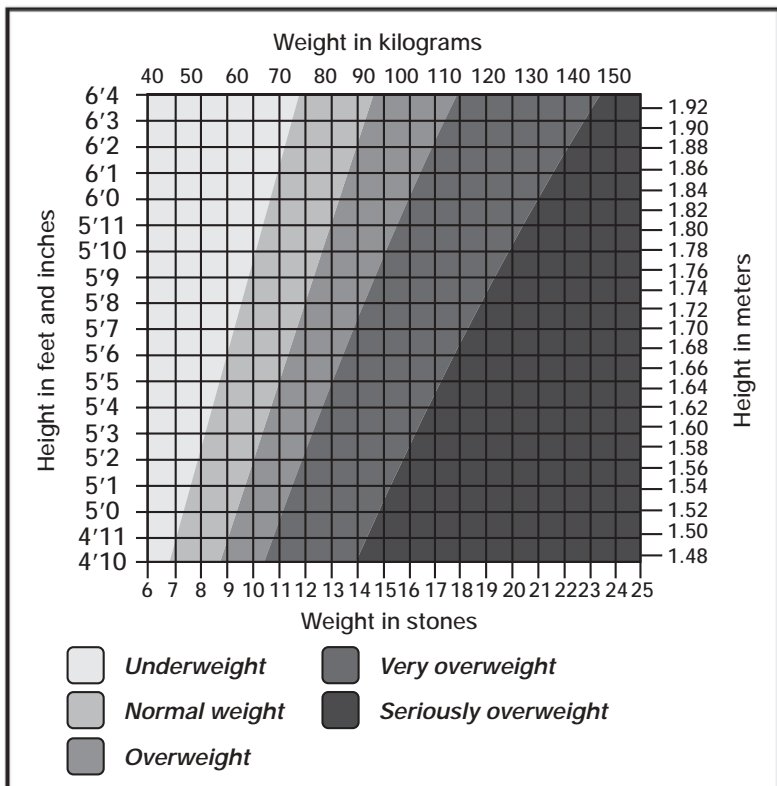
3 Using the results of your MoT, the doctor will be able to:

- Assess how much weight you need to lose.
 - Suggest a sensible weight-loss rate (usually around 0.5 to 1 kg (1 to 2 lbs) per week).
 - Help with a plan of action to help you lose weight (eg, balanced diet, exercise regime, weight-loss medication).
- 4 Your doctor or practice nurse will be able to provide a number of weight-loss services. The exact services offered will vary from practice to practice, but most doctors can provide:
- A series of tests to make sure that your weight gain has not caused an underlying condition such as diabetes.
 - A healthy eating plan.
 - A sensible exercise regimen.
 - Expert advice and support.
 - Anti-obesity drug treatment.

3 To get the most from your visit, follow a few simple rules

Make weight loss the sole reason for seeing your doctor

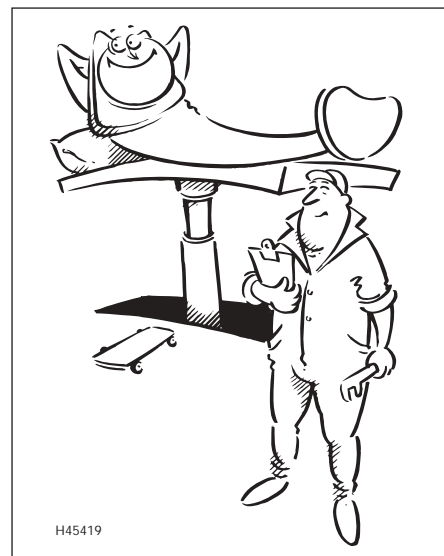
1 Losing weight is an important clinical issue. If you only mention it at the end of a consultation about something else, your doctor may mistakenly believe that you are not committed to losing your excess weight. Reducing obesity is a priority for the NHS, so you should give your doctor enough time to be able to discuss your weight loss in detail.



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BMI graph

This applies to both adult men and women, but not sportspeople as muscle is heavier than fat



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Your doctor will assess how weight is affecting your overall health

Show your doctor that you are serious about losing weight

2 Losing weight needs a commitment from you too. Explain that you are determined to lose weight, and that you fully understand that this will entail sensible eating and regular exercise. You could also take this opportunity to ask about the various treatment options which will help to aid the weight-loss process.

Tell your doctor about your previous weight-loss experiences

3 You need to be totally honest with your doctor, in order to receive the advice and support that is right for you. Openly describe your eating habits and current levels of physical activity, and tell your doctor about any previous weight-loss attempts. It is important for him to understand why these attempts failed, so that you are successful this time.

Tell your doctor or practice nurse about how being fat is making you feel

4 Although it may seem difficult at first, it will help your doctor or nurse if you could explain how being fat makes you feel. Be as open and as honest as you can. Don't just describe the physical repercussions (eg, shortness of breath, frequent tiredness), also try to describe how you feel on an emotional level (eg, does your weight problem leave you feeling depressed, do you 'comfort eat'?).

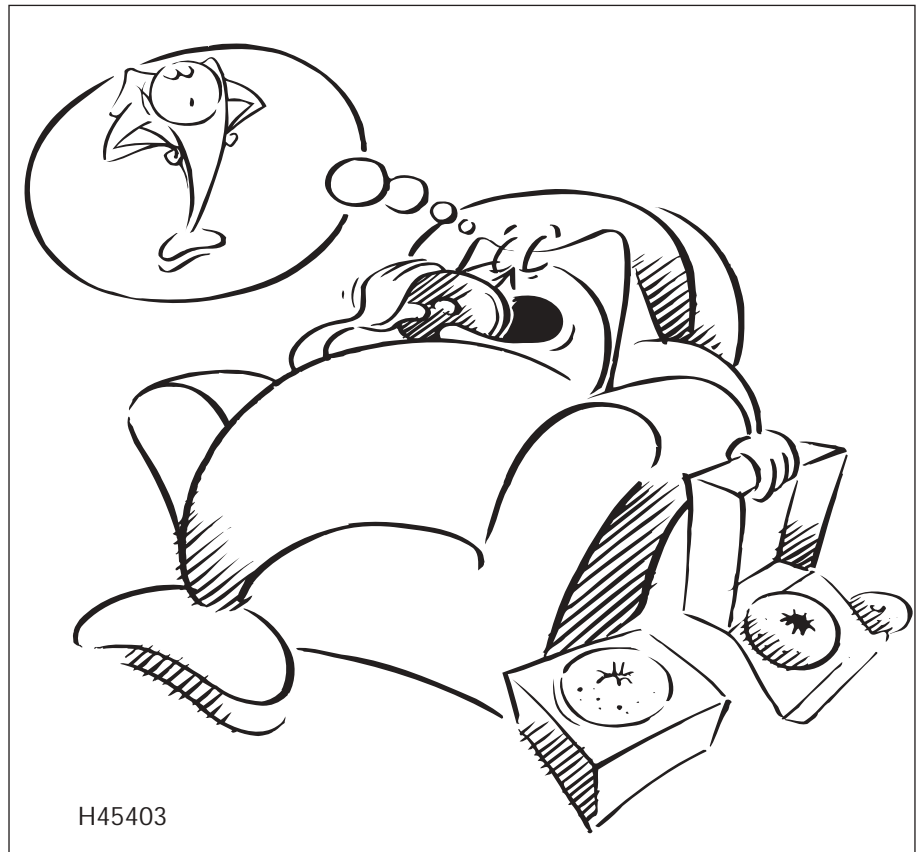
4 Visiting an 'obesity bodyshop'

1 Some practices also offer dedicated weight-loss clinics. This type of clinic provides frequent motivation and continuous advice.

2 Clinics usually last around 20-30 minutes and are held at fortnightly intervals. The person who runs the clinic may be your doctor or your practice nurse.

3 The itinerary is designed to be educational and varied, and will help to keep you motivated as you strive to lose your excess weight. You should be prepared to commit to attending the clinic for at least one year.

4 Activities at these weight-loss clinics may include:



Does your weight problem make you comfort eat?

- *Thinking about the main reasons why you have become overweight.*
- *Thinking about how losing weight will improve your health and quality of life.*
- *Monitoring food intake and physical activity.*
- *Developing a basic understanding of nutrients and food groups.*
- *Learning techniques for staying in control when you are eating out.*
- *Reading and interpreting food labels to help identify healthy and unhealthy foods.*
- *Identifying your trigger foods (foods that you have trouble stopping eating) and planning to avoid them.*
- *Developing an appropriate programme for increase in physical activities.*

5 Getting a jump start

1 If you are finding it difficult to lose weight, your doctor can also prescribe special weight-loss medications.

2 There are currently two medications

that can help to boost your weight loss attempts. Both of these medications must be taken alongside a sensible diet and exercise programme, and are only suitable if your BMI is more than 27 and if you have other obesity-related conditions, or if your BMI is greater than 30.

3 These two medications are called sibutramine and orlistat.

- Sibutramine works by helping you learn to eat less. You are therefore able to eat smaller meal portions without feeling hungry. When used in conjunction with a low-calorie diet and exercise programme, studies have shown that most people on sibutramine achieve initial weight losses of at least 5-10% (eg, a minimum of 5-10 kg in a 100 kg man)³.
- Orlistat impedes absorption of up to a third of the fat you take in from your diet⁴. It is important that people on orlistat stick to a low-fat diet.

4 If you feel that you would benefit from taking either of these medications, you should visit your doctor.

References

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