

National guidelines for obesity care

Summary

2023



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Obesity is a complex, chronic condition that has a detrimental impact on people's quality of life. It also increases the risk of other serious conditions. Around 1.3 million adults and 80.000 children in Sweden are obese. The condition is becoming increasingly common, particularly in socioeconomically disadvantaged groups.

People with obesity need to receive high-quality care and respectful treatment from healthcare professionals. The regions need to set aside more resources for the care of children and adults with obesity in the coming years.

Importance of early detection and coordinated care

Children and adults with obesity need coordinated healthcare, from early detection and assessment to treatment and follow-up. Early intervention is important to prevent continued weight gain, which increases the risk of secondary diseases and can complicate treatment. As obesity is a chronic condition, there is also a need for long-term follow-up, often lifelong, and new interventions where required.

Decision-makers in healthcare need to make sure that the interventions are coordinated and continuous. To achieve this, there is a need for collaboration between regional healthcare services and others involved, such as medical interventions by school health services, other municipal healthcare and social services. Collaboration is particularly important when people with obesity need special support, for example due to severe disabilities or severe mental health problems.

Prejudice and stigma are common – there is a need for skills development

Many people with obesity encounter prejudice, discrimination and stigma, including in the healthcare sector. A disparaging attitude has a detrimental impact on both quality of life and care in itself. Chairs and treatment tables that are unable to bear the patient's weight are also a source of stigma, for example. There is therefore a need for greater knowledge and adapted premises with the right equipment. As a decision-maker in the healthcare sector, you need to be able to offer skills development to all staff, to ensure both knowledge-based care and care visits that are free from stigma.

Obesity can be treated

Many people who seek treatment for obesity have tried to lose weight themselves in various ways. There is often a lack of focus on holistic wellbeing and health, and people's efforts may have been of no benefit or even have led to adverse side effects. Obesity can also be difficult to treat in the healthcare system, and patients may need to try several different treatments. All the regions therefore need to be able to offer combined lifestyle treatment, drug treatment and surgery. The top priorities are:

- customised combined lifestyle treatment for people with special support needs
- gastric bypass surgery for adults with a BMI above 35.

Healthcare needs to be more equitable

There are wide differences in obesity care in Sweden. Some regions have specialist care units for children or adults with obesity, for example, while others do not. The proportion of people with obesity receiving treatment and what the treatment consists of also differ in both primary care and specialist care.

Patients face high costs themselves, and many of them do not have access to the treatment they need. Many more people need publicly funded obesity surgery, for example, and none of the appetite-regulating obesity drugs are currently included in the national scheme for subsidising prescription drugs.

With these guidelines, the National Board of Health and Welfare intends to contribute to more equitable and high quality healthcare. The package of guidelines also includes indicators for follow-up. We will use them to assess how the regions and municipalities follow the guidelines.