

How to protect your child from harmful weight and BMI talk at the paediatrician's office



Many paediatricians are unaware that interventions relating to weight in kids (just like adults) are not effective *long term*, despite the fact there is ample evidence they aren't.

What's more, many paediatricians are unaware that when they talk about weight, BMI, growth curves or "eating healthier" in front of kids and teens, their comments can unintentionally trigger:

- Body dissatisfaction
- Poor self-esteem
- Dieting
- Disordered eating
- Eating disorders

If you want to prevent your child from hearing confusing and harmful messages around weight, BMI, growth charts and "healthy"/"unhealthy" eating, you can ask your provider not to discuss these things in front of your child.

Now, I know many parents find it awkward asking a paediatrician not to discuss their child's weight in front of their child. However, it may help to know that this request is consistent with a 2016 statement by the [American Pediatric Association](#) which states that dieting is counterproductive to weight-management efforts and that dieting also can predispose to eating disorders (CW: stigmatising language used in the article).

As parents, you can shift the conversation at medical and other health visits. Making this shift protects your child from confusing and harmful messages around weight and BMI and creates space to focus on other important health parameters and true health promoting behaviours (like sleep, movement, food variety, food insecurity).

Not sure how to approach this? Here's an approach and script you can use (and adapt to your needs) to help you navigate your next visit to your paediatrician (or other health provider) and protect your child from potential harm.

Communicate your request

Before your appointment, send your paediatrician a letter informing them that you do not want them to discuss weight, BMI, body size, growth charts or "healthy/unhealthy" eating with your child or teen present.

Here's a sample script you can use....

Sample script

Dear doctor _____

As parents, we want our daughter/son to have a healthy relationship with food and their body. We kindly ask you not to mention weight, BMI, growth charts, or "healthy"/"unhealthy" eating in the presence of our child. If you have any questions or concerns about our child's growth, we can address these when our child is not present.

Thank you for your understanding!

Sincerely,

Parent name _____

For follow-up appointments, consider sending a reminder

You may need to remind your child's doctor at the next couple of visits. Healthcare professionals are people too and sometimes they forget.

Speak up, if necessary

You are allowed to speak up if the conversation starts to turn to weight, BMI and body size.

You might say, "Excuse me. I'm going to have to stop you right there. Can we discuss this privately?"

If your paediatrician doesn't respect your wishes

This really shouldn't happen, but if your paediatrician doesn't respect your wishes for the safety of your child and you have the option of doing so, consider finding another provider.

Please note: although doctors and other health professionals shouldn't discuss weight in front of children, it is still important that children are weighed and their height measured once a year to make sure they are growing as expected. When a child isn't growing or gaining weight or is losing weight, these can be signs that something concerning is going on. ***Weight and height still need to be monitored, but to avoid any potential harm, consider discussing these measurements in the absence of your child.***



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