Doctors told to get serious about obesity

ATLANTA: Next time you go for a checkup, don't be surprised if your doctor gets on your case about your weight. The medical profession has issued new guidelines for fighting the nation's obesity epidemic, and they urge physicians to be a lot more aggressive about helping patients drop those extra pounds.

Doctors should calculate your body mass index, a weight-to-height ratio. And if you need to lose weight, they should talk to you about counseling and other obesity treatments, following in the steps of the Medicare program, which began paying for counseling on obesity last year.

More than a third of obese patients recall their doctor talking to them about weight loss surgery for patients with a BMI of 40 or for those with a BMI of 35 who also have two other risk factors for heart disease such as diabetes or high blood pressure. Refer overweight and obese patients who are headed for heart problems to weight-loss programs. Specifically, discuss enrolling them in at least 14 face-to-face counseling sessions over six months with a registered dietician, psychologist or other professional with training in weight management.

Weigh all evidence for your own health. For most men, a weight greater than 203 pounds would qualify you for counseling. "We recognize that talking to patients about weight is not easy," said Dr. Dennis Ryan, co-chair of the guidelines committee.

The good news? By next year, most insurance companies are expected to cover counseling and other obesity treatments, following in the steps of the Medicare program, which began paying for counseling on obesity last year.

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