



Obesity: Reducing weight with Tibb

By: Dr. John Glynn and Prof Rashid Bhikha

November 2015

A Science of Medicine
The Art of Care

Overview

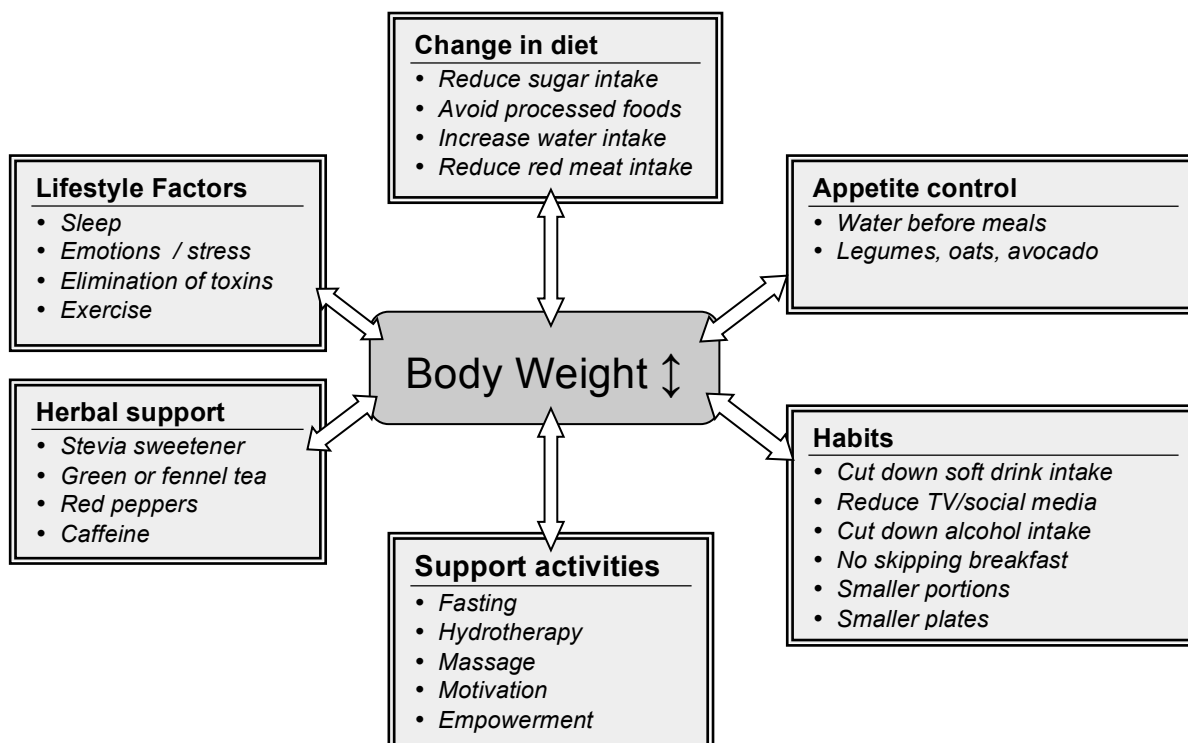
Perhaps the most pressing health issue facing South Africa and many other countries is the rising tide of obesity in the population. The effects of excessive body mass on the person, family and community, not to mention future generations, are serious; disruptive of the quality of life, costly to the economy, and notoriously difficult to reverse. Obesity damages health in several ways. It increases the risk of type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, joint disorders, heart and liver diseases, certain cancers, dementia, and depression. The obese person's self-esteem, quality of life and social status are also damaged.

Alas, there is neither a rapid 'quick fix' for being obese, nor a universally effective programme of weight loss. Why not, after all the billions spent seeking one? Several reasons: first, the overweight state has most likely developed over many months, if not years. Second, there are many mechanisms involved in regulating body weight, so no single diet, drug, supplement, appetite suppressant or exercise programme is likely to be successful *over the long term*. Third, the degree of motivation demanded is often inadequate in the face of the enticing power of fast food and drinks. *For these (and other) reasons, someone wanting to lose a few kilos needs to adopt an holistic approach.*

The Tibb view

- Tibb does not regard obesity as a disease. It is an expression of disharmony in the person, brought about by a faulty lifestyle and poor personal habits over time. The obesity epidemic is, in most cases, the result of our way of life.
- Tibb focuses on the factors leading to excess body mass. It does not obsess about the need for weight loss itself. A sensible, prudent lifestyle and suppression of bad habits will lead to an appropriate and satisfactory body mass.
- As obesity arises from a myriad of dietary, behavioural, and social factors, Tibb does not see using one single agent or activity as the way to reduce excess body mass. An holistic approach is needed.
- This is achieved by adopting the Tibb Lifestyle Factors, which, combined with good habits, leads to harmony being restored in the person.
- Tibb accepts the need for empowerment of the person, and support from peers and family.
- The key factors in Tibb's approach to reducing body mass are: good diet, plenty of exercise, keeping active mentally and physically, low levels of manageable stress, sound regular sleep, and avoidance of bad habits.
- The need to inform the person of the Tibb approach is important, so as to empower him or her in the long-term route to better health and quality of life.

The Tibb approach to reducing body mass



Tibb takes a four-pronged approach to reducing body mass:

- [A] Improving lifestyle**
- [B] Modifying personal habits**
- [C] Supporting activities**
- [D] Boosting motivation**

[A] Improving lifestyle

For Tibb, this involves the overweight person in four processes:

- (a) Analysis of the present lifestyle – *identifying areas for active improvement.*
- (b) Discussion on changes deemed necessary – *to discuss with the person which option best suits him or her.*
- (c) Implementation of changes to relevant Lifestyle Factors – *which are reasonable and acceptable.*
- (d) Counselling on improvement and necessary modifications – *encouraging persistence and reinforcing advice.*

The main Tibb Lifestyle Factors involved in body mass reduction are: a good diet, keeping physically active, low levels of manageable stress and sound, regular sleep.

Food & Drink

Reducing food intake is the most popular option for losing weight, as the innumerable diets available will testify. Tibb says that if the *quantity* of food eaten is to be reduced, the *quality* should not. It recommends good quality protein (poultry, free-range eggs, fish, lean meats and legumes) and plenty of fibre-rich items in the form of seasonal fruits, vegetables, beans and whole grain products. Eating less processed bread and pastries should be considered.

Tibb advises eating less processed food, white flour products, sugary confections and sweetened beverages, and avoiding 'yo-yo-ing' between different diets.

A number of common foods are known to naturally suppress appetite. They include oats, legumes, avocado and almonds. Full cream Greek yoghurt is also beneficial in this role.

Sugar. In recent times the addition of sugar (or fructose corn syrup) to previously sugar-free nutrients has escalated enormously. This is now regarded as perhaps the major factor underpinning the present obesity epidemic. Reducing the amount of energy taken as food, by cutting down on one or other energy-rich nutrients, usually fats or sugars, is a popular route to weight loss.

Reducing sugar should be done slowly. If done too quickly, withdrawal symptoms such as sluggishness, mood swings, irritability and sugar craving may occur. The benefits, however, are loss of weight, more energy, and lower cholesterol and blood pressure.

Soft drinks. These too have been strongly implicated in the rise of obesity. They are not filling, so people do not reduce their consumption. A glass of water, on the other hand, taken before a meal, prevents the empty feeling, so dampening down hunger pangs.

Tibb suggests selecting alternatives to soft drinks – spring water, various teas, and beverages sweetened with stevia.

Physical activity. This is a crucial part of reducing body mass. There are several factors at play here: (a) the mobilisation of fatty deposits to satisfy the increased energy demand; (b) the reduction in appetite that increased physical activity brings about; and (c) the increase in basal metabolism brought about by vigorous exercise. However, exercise alone will not suffice, because as body fat falls, lean muscle mass rises. Even so, physical activity provides many health benefits, including reduced risk of diabetes, heart disease, joint problems and cancer.

Tibb advises increased physical activity and/or exercise, consistent with the person's temperament, age and gender.

Sleep. At first glance, obesity is not linked to sleep. However, there is a strong link between sleep and over-eating. As a major Tibb Lifestyle Factor, sleep is involved in several ways:

- When sleep-deprived, a person tends to eat more, and also selects energy-rich foods and drink.
- Lack of sleep usually leads to an increased appetite, due to hormonal imbalance.
- A constantly tired person is more likely to suffer from emotional stress (another Factor), which can lead to lowered resistance to 'comfort eating'.
- Sleeping poorly can encourage a person to over-eat in order to compensate for lowered vitality.
- A tired person is an impulsive person, so is more likely to eat unwisely.

Tibb recommends practicing good sleep hygiene as an effective way of reducing excessive body mass.

Emotional stress. Tibb has long regarded a person's emotional state as a major Lifestyle Factor, which has a marked effect on health in general. It can also influence the build-up, or loss of, body mass. This is probably related to the person's temperament. Some people eat more than normal when they are depressed, sad or bored with life, and if unresolved, this invariably leads to overweight or, if unresolved for long enough, to obesity.

Many people crave 'comfort foods' such as sugary snacks and soft drinks when they are stressed emotionally. They may also indulge in 'binge eating'. This is because unrelenting emotional stress, whether work-related or domestic, disturbs the person's inner hormonal harmony.

Tibb suggests personally acceptable relaxation measures to relieve stress - deep breathing exercises, meditation, physical exercise, massage, yoga, aromatherapy and herbal medicines, for example.

Temperament. One of the main pillars of Tibb theory and practice is temperament. It is an important aspect of diagnosis and treatment, particularly in people affected by chronic conditions. It is therefore important in the long term management of overweight and obesity. Any changes to the person's daily food and drink have to be consistent with his or her temperament, as does the type of physical exercise or personal activity selected. Stress-relieving actions also have to consider the person's temperament.

[B] Modifying personal habits

Several of these can contribute surreptitiously to increased body mass.

- *Drinking soft drinks regularly through the day.* Many of these are loaded with sugar or corn syrup, probably the main culprits in weight gain.
- *Spending too much time at the computer.* Not only does this reduce physical activity, but it invariably goes with constant snacking.
- *Constant snacking through the day.* Whether at work, home or socially, high energy snacks are omnipresent.
- *Skipping breakfast.* If done regularly, this leads to weight gain.
- *Regular alcohol drinking.* As a reward, or from boredom, or to aid sleep – this puts on weight.
- *Relying on cars, busses and taxis,* rather than feet, bicycles and scooters.
- *Smaller portions, smaller plates.* The increasing size of food portions and even plates has apparently contributed to increasing body mass.

[C] Supporting activities

Fasting

Many overweight people opt for fasting as a rapid and effective way of shedding excess kilos, and the procedure is enjoying renewed popularity. Although a prolonged fast does lead to a sometimes impressive fall in body mass, the loss is due mainly to the loss of water and carbohydrate stores, and is often rapidly made up once the normal eating patterns are resumed. Why? Because the person's metabolic rate slows down, so the food consumed *after* the fast puts on more weight than it did *before* the fast. In fact, many people eat more after going through a fast, especially if they fast for a full day or skip a meal. Fasting is therefore not regarded as a healthy or feasible route to sustained weight loss. It may be an effective way of treating a number of medical disorders, but it's not a viable option for cosmetic weight loss. There is also the risk that fasting for weight loss can lead to 'compensatory gorging' after the fast is over.

Herbal products

There is a huge variety of plant-derived products which have been used traditionally to prevent or reverse weight gain. Pineapple, licorice, plantain, psyllium, green and fennel teas, evening primrose, and mukul have been used traditionally for centuries. Each of these (and many others) have their advocates. A glass of water taken before a meal will dull appetite.

[D] Boosting motivation

Reducing excess body mass, and keeping it off, takes considerable effort and commitment, and needs a lot of encouragement. There are a number of valid reasons to lose weight: cosmetic appearance, better health, and special occasions such as an imminent wedding or holiday. However, the task of losing weight – for whatever purpose – cannot be delegated to diets, drugs, supplements, exercise schedules or exotic herbs. Alas, many, if not most, of these fail. One major reason is that the overweight person expects too much of the diet, supplement or whatever. As his or her increased body mass has probably taken many months, even years, to build up, it is unrealistic to expect many kilos to be shed in a few days, weeks or even months.

Hunger is a basic human drive, difficult to suppress over time. Anyone trying to restrict food intake by conscious effort is almost certainly going to fail.

As Tibb states, overweight is usually the outcome of a disordered lifestyle and erratic personal habits. Making positive and beneficial changes to these takes time, so that Physis can adjust to the changes without too much disturbance. There is therefore a constant need for motivation of the person seeking to lose weight.

Summary

Excess body mass brings with it a number of real threats to a person's general wellbeing, and this can have a serious impact on quality of life. In addition, being overweight is closely linked to type 2 diabetes, heart disease, certain cancers and joint disorders. Tibb sees excessive body weight as a visible manifestation of internal disharmony over a long time, due to a complex mix of influences, both environmental and internal. Sadly, there is no 'quick fix' for promoting weight loss. Dealing with it therefore needs an holistic approach. When we become overweight, the inner harmony affecting energy balance is disturbed, so any remedies should act to restore this, by assisting Physis. The person's temperament also needs to be taken into consideration. Tibb's approach is to deal with three aspects of lifestyle – food intake, physical activity, and sleep hygiene. For instance, dietary sugar and fructose syrup, now revealed as major culprits, need to be severely curtailed, together with most processed foods. In support of these changes, physical activity needs to be increased, and good sleeping patterns developed. Fasting as a time-tested method for weight shedding may also be employed. Natural, herbal appetite-suppressing agents may also be co-opted. People committed to meaningful and long-term weight loss need constant support and encouragement, as the incentive to lose weight may dim with time.

Further reading

Dangers of obesity: <http://www.webmd.com/diet/obesity/obesity-health-risks>

Conventional treatment of obesity: <http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Obesity/Pages/Treatment.aspx>

Fasting: <http://fitness.mercola.com/sites/fitness/archive/2013/03/01/daily-intermittent-fasting.aspx>

Cutting down sugar: <http://dailyhealthpost.com/7-ways-to-eliminate-excess-sugar-from-your-diet/>

Herbs opposing weight gain: http://holisticonline.com/remedies/weight/weight_herbs-for-obesity.htm

Counseling in obesity: <http://www.jcomjournal.com/how-to-deliver-high-quality-obesity-counseling-in-primary-care-using-the-5as-framework/>
