

Helping A Friend Deal With Obesity

(NAPSA)—Are you worried about someone in your life who is seriously overweight? Are you afraid that your friend or loved one will eventually suffer from heart disease, diabetes or another killer disease?

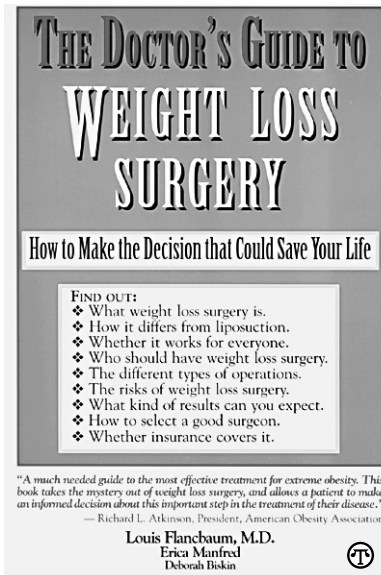
Your fears are justified.

Extremely obese people are 10 times more likely to die prematurely than normal-weight people are. However, you may feel at a loss to help your obese friend, because you are afraid of insulting him or her. So what can you do to help?

Just about every fat person has been on multiple diets that failed, and doesn't need to be told one more time that she needs to lose weight. Most fat people are acutely aware of their weight and are often painfully self-conscious about it. Statistics show that 95 percent of diets result in the regaining of the lost weight and then some—especially for the severely obese. Exercise can also be painful and unpleasant for people who carry around 100 or more extra pounds, making it a chore they are unlikely to perform regularly.

You can, however, help your obese friend lose weight by taking positive action. Here's how:

- Exercise with your friend. For example, sign up with her for a water aerobics class. This kind of exercise is easy and fun for obese people. If she is embarrassed to be seen in a swimsuit or exercise class, try to find a class for seniors or people with disabilities. If a class isn't feasible, offer to walk with her on a regular basis. Keep to her pace so she



A new book may offer life-changing help for those with the weightiest problems.

won't feel unable to keep up.

- Take a low-fat cooking class together. You can learn together how to eat better. Many people, both obese and non-obese, do not understand how to create healthy, tasty, low-fat meals.

- Go shopping with her in a plus-size store. Many fat people don't feel that they deserve to look good, or to spend money on flattering, quality clothes. Studies show that when obese people treat themselves to new outfits that fit, they are *less* likely to overeat because the clothes improve their self-esteem.

- Be aware of your friend's physical limitations. Avoid restaurants with booths she can't fit in,

or events where she won't be able to participate or might feel embarrassed, like hikes or swim parties.

- Suggest weight loss surgery. Many people who are 100 pounds or more overweight may have considered weight loss surgery—the only treatment that produces substantial permanent weight loss—but may be fearful or uninformed about it. One indirect way to approach the topic without insulting your friend may be to give her a book about it. Dr. Richard Atkinson, President of the American Obesity Association suggests *The Doctor's Guide to Weight Loss Surgery; How to Make the Decision That Could Save Your Life*, co-authored by Louis Flancbaum, M.D., chief of the Division of Bariatric Surgery at St. Luke's-Roosevelt Hospital Center in New York City. Atkinson calls it “a much-needed guide to the most effective treatment for extreme obesity.”

- Don't assume that her weight is her fault. “Contrary to popular opinion, “Dr. Flancbaum asserts, “obesity is *not* a personality disorder resulting from a lack of willpower or self-control. Rather, it is a chronic disease which can be detrimental to health.”

- Above all, be sensitive and compassionate. Think before you talk about weight. Avoid saying things like, “*I feel so fat since I gained those five extra pounds,*” or “*You have such a pretty face, if only you lost weight.*” Put yourself in her place before making comments that might be hurtful. Try to understand what it must feel like to be socially stigmatized.