

Wellness Service – Weight Neutral Approach

Weight-neutral approaches to health interventions are a relatively new therapeutic alternative to traditional weight-loss approaches. Evidence is emerging that many physical health improvements attributed to weight loss interventions relate to changed behaviours eg. Increased physical activity, reduced intake of salt and saturated fats, increased fruit and vegetable intake, rather than weight loss itself. National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) of Australia weight management guidelines reports A level evidence for weight regain in weight managing services. “Regardless of the degree of initial weight loss, most weight is regained within a 2-year period and by 5 years the majority of people are at their pre-intervention body weight.”. It therefore makes sense to focus on the health behaviours rather than the weight loss goals when supporting people to improve their health.

Weight-neutral approaches generally involve focusing on improving health behaviours such as patients’ relationships with food, removing moral judgments around food, building awareness of hunger and fullness cues, emphasizing emotional and physical wellness over the pursuit of a lower weight or size.

The Kirklees Wellness Service has piloted ‘Our Wellbeing’ sessions which offer a weight neutral approach to health. There are modules on managing stress, sleep, increasing physical activity, improving relationships with food and exploring the relationship between food and mood. We will be offering a free “mini health check” pre and post the sessions to try to identify baseline markers and identify positive change to physical health because of the sessions. We currently have our first group running with attendees in the coming weeks and are excited to see the outcomes in the new year.

This approach will also underpin, where appropriate, our Wellness Serviced 1:1 support with people, especially if their primary focus isn’t a weight loss target or traditional outcome measure (BMI reduction for example). This is a great fit with the Wellness service approach in general, support is person led, focused, upskilling individuals to improve their ability to take control of issues which are important to them. We will be working closely with Public Health Kirklees to evaluate this initial pilot and approach, we hope over time this is something we can offer in our “core” Healthy Weight programme in the future.

What a weight neutral intervention might look like:

- Size accepting - encourage/enable healthy behaviours regardless of current weight status or body shape, with an emphasis on body acceptance and self-worth
- Focus on health gains and longevity boosters that are independent of weight, size , or shape
- Regular activity/movement and improving diet quality/better nutrition
- An end to people feeling having embarrassing conversations about weight, and instead having positive conversations about health