TOOL E2 Early identification of patients

For:	All healthcare professionals who are particularly in contact with children and pregnant women – midwives, health visitors, GPs, obstetricians, paediatricians, and so on
About:	This tool provides information on ways to identify those patients – particularly children and pregnant women – who are most at risk of becoming obese later in life and who are in most need of assistance, before formal assessments of overweight are made. Healthcare professionals will need to consult the Child Health Promotion Programme (CHPP) publication[151] for more detailed information, particularly about the CHPP schedule.
Purpose:	To provide background information on how healthcare professionals can identify patients most at risk of becoming obese later in life.
Use:	To be used to identify patients most at risk of becoming obese later in life.
Resource:	The information is reproduced from *The Child Health Promotion Programme: Pregnancy and the first five years of life*.[151] Please see the *CHPP schedule* as it sets out both the core universal programme to be commissioned and provided for all families, and additional preventive elements that the evidence suggests may improve outcomes for children with medium and high risk factors. Go to www.dh.gov.uk to download the document.

Assessment: Key points

Patients need a skilled assessment so that any assistance can be personalised to their needs and choices. Any system of early identification has to be able to:

- identify the risk factors that make some children more likely to experience poorer outcomes in later childhood, including family and environmental factors
- include protective factors as well as risks
- be acceptable to both parents
- promote engagement in services and be non-stigmatising
- be linked to effective interventions
- capture the changes that take place in the lives of children and families
- include parental and child risks and protective factors, and
- identify safeguarding risks for the child.

Social and psychological indicators

At-risk indicators: Children

Generic indicators can be used to identify children who are at risk of poor educational and social outcomes (for example, those with parents with few or no qualifications, poor employment prospects or mental health problems). Neighbourhoods also affect outcomes for children. Families subject to a higher-than-average risk of experiencing multiple problems include:

- families living in social housing
- families with a young mother or young father
- families where the mother's main language is not English

- families where the parents are not co-resident, and
- families where one or both parents grew up in care.

At-risk indicators: Pregnant women

It can be difficult to identify risks early in pregnancy, especially in first pregnancies, as often little is known about the experience and abilities of the parents, and the characteristics of the child. Useful predictors during pregnancy include:

- young parenthood, which is linked to poor socioeconomic and educational circumstances
- educational problems – parents with few or no qualifications, non-attendance or learning difficulties
- parents who are not in education, employment or training
- families who are living in poverty
- families who are living in unsatisfactory accommodation
- parents with mental health problems
- unstable partner relationships
- intimate partner abuse
- parents with a history of anti-social or offending behaviour
- families with low social capital
- ambivalence about becoming a parent
- stress in pregnancy
- low self-esteem or low self-reliance, and
- a history of abuse, mental illness or alcoholism in the mother's own family.

Obesity-specific indicators

There are specific risk factors and protective factors for obesity. For example, a child is at a greater risk of becoming obese if one or both of their parents is obese.

Key point
Some of the indicators listed are more difficult to identify than others. Health professionals need to be skilled at establishing a trusting relationship with families and be able to build a holistic view.