

Not Just Baby Fat

During the weeks and months following a baby's birth, the medical focus is on weight gain. Babies are routinely weighed to make sure that fat is being developed. Fat on a newborn baby shows that they are getting the nourishment they need.



At some point, however, the need for additional body fat stops. As a healthy toddler begins getting exercise and eating solid foods, their body fat levels stabilize and they lose the "baby fat." Unfortunately, some children continue gaining weight at an unhealthy pace, beginning a struggle with obesity that could last the rest of their lives. By helping children avoid or conquer excess weight at an early age, we can prepare them for a long, happy, energy-filled life.

Don't ignore obesity! If your child's doctor or school officials have noted a weight problem, it deserves your full attention. Reversing childhood obesity takes a conscious effort; it won't happen by itself.

If your child is obese, there are no two ways about it: they must make changes in diet and exercise. This is not a stress-free process, and some children need more encouragement and motivation than others.

Child Obesity Statistics

About 19% of American children (between ages 2 and 19) are obese, meaning their BMI (Body Mass Index) measures at 30 or above. This distressing number shows how important it is that parents take responsibility for their children's health instead of leaving it in the hands of other adults or — even worse — in the hands of children themselves. Children do not have all the information or motivation they need to make well-rounded nutritional choices, and often gravitate toward sweet, salty, and fat-rich foods. Without strong guidance from parents, children quickly get on the road to obesity.

LEARN MORE

Make smart decisions about your health and visit a physician or health specialist for advice and questions.

CDC's Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity

www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpao

CDC Healthy Youth

www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/obesity/facts.html

YOUR CHILD'S WEIGHT



Parents must take responsibility for their children's health and nutritional lifestyles. Children must be taught how to live healthy by example.

HEALTHY DIRECTIONS

©2023 Prevention & Treatment Resource Press, LLC
www.PTRPress.com • 877-329-0570 • product #PB-PH29
This pamphlet may not be copied.

HEALTHY DIRECTIONS



Factors Contributing to Obesity

Why do children become overweight? There are many different factors, but three are prominent. Unfortunately, our modern society encourages unhealthy behaviors, and it takes real effort to counteract that influence.

Diet

What children eat is the most important factor in determining whether or not they are healthy. The push to reform school lunch systems across the country, ensuring that each child gets a balanced, healthy meal in the middle of the day is useless unless it is supported by healthy meals at home. Children need a nutritious breakfast that will prepare them for their day, and a dinner emphasizing vegetables and healthy proteins in the evening. And don't forget snacks! Don't allow your children to sabotage their healthy meals by getting sodas, candy, and chips from vending machines or the fridge during the day.

Exercise

Children are just as busy as we are, and we all know how difficult it is for us to find time to exercise. Health experts warn against allowing children too much T.V. or computer time; growing kids need plenty of physical activity to keep their bodies challenged. Athletics and exercise will turn those calories into muscle instead of stored fat.

Negative Example

Becoming a parent means that your lifestyle is no longer just your own— it also has a dramatic effect on the way your child approaches their own life. Helping your child stay healthy means making real changes in the way you eat and exercise! As your child enters their teenage years, you will find it more difficult to insist on healthy behavior unless you show that you place a high priority on health in your own life.

Consequences

Obesity has a negative influence on any person's life. If obesity is an issue in childhood, the emotional and physical damage could have consequences during vital years of development. Even as healthy adults, people who were obese as children are still emotionally affected by those younger years.

Health

Overweight children simply have more trouble performing the daily tasks of life. Running to class, keeping up with physical education, and playing on the playground become hard work instead of enjoyable experiences. An unhealthy lifestyle leaves kids vulnerable to illnesses, like cardiovascular diseases, sleep apnea, and prediabetes. Asthma and other respiratory diseases are common among obese and overweight young people.



Obesity affects more than physical health – it damages mental and emotional health as well.

Self-Esteem

Whether or not they suffer bullying and ridicule from other children at school, most obese kids have a daily struggle with their own self-image. Each time they look in the mirror, they see someone who is less healthy and ready for life than the people around them. The social stigma that comes with being overweight or obese affects people years after childhood, even when they have lost the weight. Overweight youth tend to pass up opportunities and avoid trying new things, choosing rather to keep a low profile and avoid drawing attention to themselves. Don't be too quick to label this as a "phase;" it could be the beginning of a lifelong self-esteem problem caused by obesity.

Habits

Childhood and teen years are formative. People tend to carry into adulthood the habits and preferences that they developed as children. This can be a negative or a positive fact, depending on what habits you instill in your child. A child who learns to value a balanced diet and physical activity will find it easy to adopt a healthy lifestyle when they leave home and take charge of their own health.

Physical Development

Childhood is the most important developmental stage in a person's life. Obesity hampers healthy development, preventing muscles, bones, and even the brain from reaching their full potential. Avoid thinking of extra weight as a minor problem. It is an indicator that your child is on track to face a long list of diseases like diabetes, heart trouble, and back pain long into adulthood and even old age.

To avoid or help reduce obesity in your children, try these tips:

- Prepare healthy meals for the entire family. Do not single out a child with a different meal.
- Consider the effect on an overweight child when purchasing snack foods and other unhealthy items to store in the house.
- Plan physical activities with the family.
- Encourage walking or riding a bike to places if it is a reasonable distance from the home.
- Don't just limit television, computer, or gaming time— replace it with physical activity.
- Establish a reward system with reasonable goals to help a child lose weight and maintain healthy eating choices.
- Plan activities and busy schedules with meals in mind to lessen the chance of a "fast-food-fix."

These lifestyle habits will prevent your child from having to face the problems of obesity or help your overweight child to gain control of their health and life. Remember to always set a good example and be encouraging for your child!

