

# CHILDHOOD OBESITY



## BASIC INFORMATION

### DESCRIPTION

Obesity (or being overweight) means having too much body fat. In children or adolescents, it means they weigh more than normal for their age, height, and sex.

### FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

A health care provider will usually diagnose an overweight child, but a parent may notice that a child:

- Appears heavier than other children of the same age.
- Eats a lot of food, but is always hungry.
- Often feels tired and is not very active physically.

### CAUSES

- Usually it is a combination of too little physical activity, being sedentary (sitting for long periods), and poor eating habits (eating too many high-calorie foods).
- A child's genes can play a small part. Genes are what determine a person's height, hair, eye, and skin color.
- A few children may have a hormone problem.

### RISK INCREASES WITH

- Not being physically active. Watching television or sitting at a computer for several hours a day.
- Unhealthy eating habits. Eating foods high in fat and sugar. Eating while watching television. Eating when not hungry. Eating too many fast-food meals.
- A child who has obese parents.

### PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Children learn from their parents. If parents practice healthy eating and physical activity habits themselves, their children are more likely to make the right choices.
- Parents should not use food as a reward system.
- Schools need to serve healthful food in school meals.

### EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Parents who are concerned and involved can help a child lose weight and increase physical activity levels. It takes time and effort and should be a long-term goal.

### POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Emotional problems, such as being teased by other children, low self-esteem, depression, and anxiety.
- Health risks while still a child and later as an adult. These include type 2 diabetes, problems that can lead to heart disease, orthopedic (bone and muscle) problems, liver disease, asthma, and overweight as an adult.



## DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT

### GENERAL MEASURES

- Health care providers use growth charts as one tool to track children's growth and development. These charts list ideal weights and normal BMI (body mass index) scores for the child's age, height and sex. A BMI

score is computed using a child's age, height, and weight. During well-child exams, your child's weight and height are compared to these charts. The results may show the child is overweight. If the child's excess weight is a health concern, a weight loss treatment plan should be worked out.

- A child's treatment plan has five parts. They include goals for pounds to lose, new eating habits, more physical activity, behavior changes, and family involvement.
- Goals for weight loss and physical activity should start low. Your child can see results and not feel stressed.
- Have your child keep a food and activity diary. Write down information about what they eat and do. It helps to see where there is success or a possible problem.
- Reward your child when a certain goal or behavior change is achieved. Don't use food as a reward.
- To learn more: American Obesity Association, 1250 24th St., NW, Suite 300, Washington, DC 20037; (800) 98-obese; website: [www.obesity.org](http://www.obesity.org). To calculate a child's BMI: [www.obesityhelp.com/kidscalculator.php](http://www.obesityhelp.com/kidscalculator.php). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has a website to answer children's questions: [www.bam.gov](http://www.bam.gov).

### MEDICATIONS

Drugs used for adult obesity are not used for children.

### ACTIVITY

- Establish limits on TV watching and computer time.
- Your child should spend 30 to 60 minutes daily being physically active. This time can include sports, exercise, active games, and doing chores.
- Get the whole family to walk, skate or bike together.

### DIET

- Plan healthy meals for the whole family that you sit down and eat together. This way your child won't feel alone in changing eating habits.
- Read food labels. Don't buy foods high in calories, fat and sugar. Look for high fiber food items.
- Limit the number of fast-food meals each week.
- Drink fat-free milk (if the child is over 2).
- Avoid juices and drinks with high sugar content.



## NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You have concerns about your child's weight.
- You need help in diet planning.

Special notes:

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