

Causes, effects and treatments of childhood obesity

[Health & Medicine](#), [Childhood Obesity](#)



Childhood Obesity: A Modern Epidemic

- David B Meistrich

Childhood obesity has been a problem across the globe for years now and it only seems to be getting worse. The effects of being an obese child are terrible on their health in their development and during adulthood. There are things that can be done to chance the lifestyle of these children which hopefully will be implemented by them and their parents.

Childhood obesity is a terrible epidemic that affects many children across the globe and it seems to only been getting worse. That being said, how is childhood obesity defined and what leads a child down the path of obesity? When a child becomes obese what are the symptoms that result from their condition? Lastly, how can a parent of an obese child help their child overcome their problem and find a new, healthier lifestyle?

Childhood obesity is an epidemic in the United States with very high numbers that seems to be an ever increasing problem. According to statistics published by the CDC in February there has been a large decline in childhood obesity in children between the ages of two and five years of age. In 2003-2004 about fourteen percent of children in this age group were considered obese whereas in 2011-2012 only about eight percent of children of this age were considered to be obese, which comes out to be about a forty three percent decline in those eight years (cdc. gov, 2014, p. 1). Though these statistics give us a glimmer of hope in the fight against this terrible problem another study done by the medical journal JAMA Pediatrics, which used the same statistics source as the CDC, analyzed them over a larger

time period which rendered very different results. They found that though there was a decrease in childhood obesity between the ages of two and five, there was an overall increase in severe obesity in children from ages two to nineteen. According to their analysis there was an apparent and unexplainable spike in obesity in children between the ages of two and five during 2003 which may have skewed the CDC report. When the same data was considered from 1999 to 2012 considering children between the ages of two and nineteen, obesity rates increased from 14. 5% to about 17. 3% (Seaman, 2014, p. 1). The most terrifying statistic is how apparently the rate of extreme obesity in children has increased from 3. 8% to 5. 9% and the rate of the most severe obesity increasing from 0. 9% to 2. 1% between these same years (Painter, 2014, p. 1).

What is childhood obesity and how does a child become obese? The definition of obesity according to dictionary. com is: the condition of being grossly fat or overweight (Dictionary. com, 2014, p. 1). Childhood obesity according to mayoclinic. org is: a serious medical condition that affects children and adolescents. It occurs when a child is well above the normal weight for his or her age and height (Mayo Clinic Staff, 2014, p. 1). Risk factors that contribute to childhood obesity include parental obesity, higher birth weight, spending more than eight hours watching television at three years of age, getting less than ten and a half hours of sleep a night at three years of age, body size early in life, rapid weight gain in a child's first year of life, rapid growth between birth and two years of age, and body fat gain between birth and the ages of five or six (Hitti, 2005, p. 1). A study done by

the University of Michigan Health System says that the amount of food eaten by children who are obese tend to be higher calorie foods with high fat content and they also seem to eat larger portions than other children. The number of times these children eat in comparison to other children are similar and so are their levels of activity but the University speculates that these small differences in activity and food intake add up over a longer period of time. The study also found that children who watch more television and children who spend more time playing video games are at a higher risk of becoming overweight. If a child has one or more parents that are obese they are 80% more likely to become overweight him or herself. Also children who have a diabetic mother are more likely to be overweight. Though it is rare obesity can be caused by a medical condition which includes endocrine problems and other genetic syndromes (Boyse, 2011, p. 1).

Now that we know what childhood obesity is and what causes it, what are symptoms of childhood obesity? The symptoms of childhood obesity are no laughing matter. There are many life threatening conditions that result from being severely overweight. Some of the complications of untreated childhood obesity include high blood pressure, high cholesterol, type 2 diabetes, bone and joint problems, asthma, sleep problems such as sleep apnea, liver and gallbladder disease, depression, unhealthy eating habits which include eating disorders, substance abuse problems, and other health problems as they age such as heart disease and early death (Jones, 2014, p. 1). In 2011 a ten year old girl died from acute cardio-respiratory failure, sleep apnea, and acute pulmonary hypertension due to her obesity (Daily Mail Reporter, 2012,

p. 1). Though some children die from their obesity it is a rare occurrence but it does increase the likelihood. Death rates among children who develop glucose intolerance were 73% higher than those in the lowest group and children with high blood pressure are 1.5 times more likely to die prematurely from natural causes (Doheny, 2010, p. 1). The most dangerous problem with childhood obesity is absolutely its effect on adult obesity and the resulting consequences. When BMI from childhood to adulthood was tracked 40% to 80% of these children would become obese adults (Bridger, 2009, p. 1). Adult obesity is responsible for 18% of deaths among Black and White Americans according to a study by Columbia University (Paul, 2013, p. 1).

Lastly, how can parents help their children overcome this debilitating and life threatening problem? Being a good role model is very important for parents of children who suffer from obesity. If the family of an obese child changes their eating habits to set a better example the child is much more likely to adopt those habits him or herself. Making healthier food choices is very important. A few tips on how to do this include eating a variety of food with many different colors, such as fruits and vegetables. Another very important tip is making sure to eat breakfast as children who have breakfast are much less likely to be overweight. Of course breakfast choices should not include sugary cereal or pastries, instead breakfast should consist of foods like oatmeal, fruit, whole grain cereal, and so on. Obese children should have their fat intake decreased, and the types of fat that are ingesting changed. As many of these children tend to have a diet that consists of saturated fats,

they should try and move towards only eating polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats when fats are eaten as these fats are much easier for the body to process and are not going to cause serious health problems. These fats can be found in foods such as fish, nuts, and some oils. It is very important that children have regularly scheduled meal times. Building these habits will make children less likely to snack unnecessarily when they are not truly hungry, and they will be more likely to eat what they are given. Going out to eat should be limited and eating fast food should be limited if not completely cut out of their diet. Many fast food restaurants serve food that is high in saturated fats and also not of the best quality. Also, restaurants tend to serve food in larger portions than is necessary for a child to eat. Try and make more meals at home, where the ingredients can be carefully chosen and portions limited. Snacking should not be completely cut out of a child's diet, but it is important to make healthy snack choices. Though as a parent you may want to cut sugar completely out of your child's diet, it is important not to place a complete ban on it. Children will have a kind of sugar withdrawal which will increase their likelihood of overindulging when the opportunity presents itself. The best plan of action is to simply limit the amount of sugar a child can have at any given time. Along those lines the amount of juice and soda a child can have should be limited as they contain large amounts of sugar and "empty" calories that do nothing for the body. A healthier substitute would be carbonated water with lemon or lime juice. Snacks should also be just that, a snack. The number of calories should be limited to 100-150 and a snack should never turn into a meal. Fruit is also an excellent snacking choice. Yogurt and peanut butter are also good choices.

Portion control can have a very large impact on weight. Some great rules for making sure your child is not eating too much are making sure that their portions are no larger than their fist, reading food labels to get an idea of the serving size, using smaller dishes to give the impression that the serving is larger, and maybe even ordering smaller meals when out and sharing food with the child. Getting exercise is also very important. Some fun indoor games which can improve overall level of activity include hide-and-seek, tag, and Simon Says. Outdoor activities like walking, going for bike rides, and school activities, and sports can have a greatly positive impact. Doing chores with your child can help everyone burn calories. There are also some very entertaining 5 or 10k races which children can enter which you both can train for together (Robinson & Smith, 2014, p. 1). Not only are these great ways to burn calories but they will also help your child build better habits for the future.

In summation, childhood obesity is a terrible problem that is only getting worse. The number of children who have obesity and are becoming more severely obese is astounding. Childhood obesity is caused by unstructured and unmonitored eating that involves too much sugar and saturated fats. It is also affected by a lack of exercise which, when combined, can have terrible effects over time. The results of childhood obesity are no joke. Not only can children develop terrible health problems that are mostly only seen in older adults but they can die if they become unhealthy enough. The effects on their lives as adults can also be devastating. There is hope for obese children if they change their habits so that they can develop healthier

patterns and choices which will not only lead to a healthier childhood but a healthier life. Either changes will be made or in the near future there will be many more deaths resulting from being overweight and unhealthy.

Bibliography

Boyse, K. (2011, August 1). University of Michigan Health System. *Obesity & Overweight: Your Child:* . Retrieved May 29, 2014, from <http://www.med.umich.edu/yourchild/topics/obesity.htm>

Bridger, T. (2009, March 14). Childhood obesity and cardiovascular disease. . Retrieved May 29, 2014, from <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2690549/>

Childhood obesity. (n. d.). *Definition* . Retrieved May 29, 2014, from <http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/childhood-obesity/basics/definition/con-20027428>

Doheny, K. (2010, February 10). Obese Children Twice as Likely to Die Young?. *WebMD* . Retrieved May 29, 2014, from <http://www.webmd.com/parenting/news/20100210/obese-children-twice-as-likely-to-die-young>

Hitti, M. (n. d.). Child Obesity: 8 Red Flags to Watch For. *WebMD* . Retrieved May 29, 2014, from <http://www.webmd.com/children/news/20050519/child-obesity-8-red-flags-watch>

Jones, P. (2014, May 5). Health Information Center. *Symptoms Health Library* . Retrieved May 29, 2014, from <http://health.cvs.com/GetContent.aspx?token=f75979d3-9c7c-4b16-af56-3e122a3f19e3&chunkid=584192>

Painter, K. (2014, April 7). No real progress on child obesity, latest report says. *USA Today* . Retrieved May 29, 2014, from <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2014/04/07/child-obesity-progress/7421987/>

Press Release. (2014, March 20). *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention* . Retrieved May 29, 2014, from <http://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2014/p0225-child-obesity.html>

Reporter, D. (2012, March 25). The 10-year-old girl who died ‘ because she was too fat’. *Mail Online* . Retrieved May 29, 2014, from <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2120042/The-year-old-girl-died-fat.html>

Smith, M., & Robinson, L. (2014, February 1). Weight Problems & Obesity in Children. *Weight Problems and Obesity in Children: Helping your Child Reach and Maintain a Healthy Weight* . Retrieved May 29, 2014, from http://www.helpguide.org/mental/childhood_obesity.htm

Velez, M. (2014, April 8). U. S. Childhood Obesity Rates Have Actually Increased Over The Past 14 Years

(STUDY). *The Huffington Post* . Retrieved May 29, 2014, from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/04/08/childhood-obesity-rates-increased_n_5111922.html

University. (2013, August 15). News. *Obesity Kills More Americans Than Previously Thought 08/15/2013* . Retrieved May 29, 2014, from <http://www.mailman.columbia.edu/news/obesity-kills-more-americans-previously-thought>