

# Obesity in young children

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



The 21st century has witnessed a change in lifestyle of adults as well as children. Sophisticated lifestyle has brought with it the curse of Obesity in children and adults alike. The worse affected at this point are children yet as they grow the problem will eventually affect adults resulting in significant morbidity in the years to come. One of the many reasons of this disease is the vast availability of fast food joints throughout the country. Being readily available and at reachable distances, these joints affect the eating habits of children and their preferences.

Peer influence and relatively lower prices result in preference of fast food over nutritious home-made dishes. As a result, obesity has been on the rise with vast majority of children affected by it. It has been widely accepted that prevention is the best possible solution of this epidemic. Obesity is mostly defined widely using the body mass index (BMI) which is elaborated in terms of weight to height ratio (Gortmaker & Must, 1996). Children who qualify above 85th percentile are classified in the overweight category while those who qualify above the 95th percentile in the obese category.

More than ten percent of the world's school going children has been estimated to be carrying body fat in excess of the defined limits with an increased risk of encountering ailments of chronic nature. Most of these overweight children run the risk of developing type 2 diabetes, various kinds of heart diseases and a variety of other related morbidities before acquiring adolescence. Obesity also causes vitamin and mineral deficiencies, slow mobility, asthma, depression and other chronic diseases such as cancer.

The chances of developing blood clots are high which may also lead to high blood pressure subsequently leading to premature death. Keeping such

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complications in mind, it is evident that adequate steps should be taken by authorities and parents towards prevention of this disease (Gortmaker, 2002). Obesity is most common in developed nations but its prevalence has also been observed in developing ones. Most developed nations such as United States have in the recent past experienced a steep rise in the rates of child obesity. This has hence been of health concern as the government puts measures to minimize on its prevalence.

Some of the strategies involved are to create policies that will create awareness among various stakeholders. It is essential to first understand the gravity of the situation, perform root cause analysis and come to an understanding of the best possible action plan before implementation. For this purpose, several important studies have been conducted on the subject. Children are unaware of the effects of preferring fast food over nutritious alternatives. Fast food ingredients are taste bud stimulants that catch the children's palate fast and tend to stick.

The results of fast food consumption are experienced much later when it is too late. Fast food consumption influences a child's glycemic index, which is influenced by carbohydrates that merge with his blood glucose. Another important fact is that consumption of fast food produces a filling effect which does not last long and the subject becomes hungry again soon craving to have more food. This urge leads to further consumption of food which adds to the body weight ultimately paving the way to achieving obesity. Authorities at various levels are trying their best to fight obesity worldwide.

Health practitioners advise parents to give adequate nutritious food to their children and make them tasty so that the children are attracted to them.

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Several challenges are being faced in this direction. Measurement of obesity is not yet standardized across “ health institutions” which presents difficulty in accurate monitoring of trends and comparisons for large scale measures to be implemented. Widespread awareness campaigns need to be organized from time to time to emphasize the demerits of obesity and importance of physical activity for children.

It is paramount for children to play and have nutritious diet to turn into healthy adults. Informational wide spread advertisements regarding obesity related problems such as chronic ailments, resultant deficiencies, social impact etc need to be organized to create awareness. Obesity treatment and management procedures should be made available to parents by general practitioners and medical institutions in general along with their effectiveness. Enough emphasis should be given on the fact that prevention of obesity in children is the only feasible solution as compared to its treatment later.

This is applicable for developed and developing nations alike (Dietz, 1996). Health professionals are completely aware that the rising trend of obesity in children would result in heavy burden on health services due to increase in number of resultant diseases. Since the 1970s, some health institutions like the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention made it clear that there was an escalating epidemic spreading in the population and more so among the younger generation. Obesity has been classified as a crucial issue that needs resolution on priority as it affects social life as a whole.

Children suffer from slow mobility and do not take part in games and activities. Obese children have been seen suffering from adult ailments such

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as high blood pressure, respiratory infections and even cardio-respiratory diseases which can even lead to death in some cases. Obesity in childhood increases the risk of contracting chronic ailments in adolescence thereby decreasing life expectancy in the long run (Uauy, 2004). It has been widely accepted across the world that fighting obesity has been a tough task.

Fast food establishments are on the rise in industrially developed countries and children have a growing preference to fast food. Children in lower to moderate income family groups are more vulnerable to obesity due to poor diet in the form of fast food and limited opportunities for physical activities due to restricted spaces. Television also plays an important role in weight gain. Children have gotten addicted to watching television for long hours and avoid games where considerable amount of physical activity is required which helps in keeping weight in control.

Lower strata of society with considerably lower income groups have also seen rise in weight gain in children which may very well have been a result of Western or peer group influence. There are several schools of thought on what constitutes the best treatment therapy for this yet unconquered disease. Trend observations, clinical trials, tested treatment programs and many other theories have been tried with little success. Scientists all over the world have been deliberating over the best non-pharmacological and non-surgical interventions that can help contain and manage weight gain problems in obese children with long lasting effects.

Weight loss over a short period of time has been easy to achieve but does not help in the long run since such measures have resulted in a rebound gain in weight. Higher level of research is therefore of utmost importance to <https://assignbuster.com/obesity-in-young-children/>

cause long term effects with no significant negative consequences. Inadequate financial resources have been a contributing factor to delayed research endeavors in this direction. Pediatric obesity clinics in respected health and academic care centres are a cases in points.

National governments across the world should fund such research activities in light of the wide range of consequences on society. Until further research results in better solutions to the problem in hand, medical practitioners especially pediatricians should educate children's parents at every opportunity the benefits of nutritious diets for children along with physical activity. Unfortunately long term implementation of preventive action plans does not look feasible or achievable at this point.

Therefore individual and conscious efforts by a child's parents gain high importance in taking control of the situation. General practitioners should take the onus and consider it their duty to educate the society through promotional material and community activities about the repercussions of obesity and their preventive methods (McLennan, 2004). The National Health and Medical Research Council has recently developed 'Clinical practice guidelines for the management of overweight and obesity in children and adolescents' (McLennan, 2004) which should be adhered to by all practitioners without fail.

Family involvement in control and management of weight gain is absolutely important particularly for primary aged children. A combination of healthy diet rich in nutritional value, increased outdoor game activity, decreased sedentary activity, educating the children with benefits of healthy adulthood and ways to achieve it etc are the best measures to control weight gain and

obesity. Children should be motivated to engage in physical activities, play outdoor games, to take part in athletic events at school and other such activities with focus on healthy physical development.

In cases where children have already developed an affinity towards consumption of fast food, they should be motivated to take nutritious food with a fast food treat every once in a while in a decreasing trend. Prevention is the only realistic solution to weight gain and obesity problems in children. The motto " Health is Wealth" has lost its meaning and needs redemption. In this need of the hour, as an educated member of the society, it has become an important duty of every citizen worldwide, to aid in control and abolishment of this epidemic. Today's children are tomorrow's future and it is high time we aided in perfecting our future.