

# Parental influence on childhood obesity

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



Parental Influence on Childhood Obesity Today, there are many social problems that society is faced with. Among all of these problems, childhood obesity is one of them. Prevention of childhood obesity is solely the responsibility of the parents. This pressure occurs because of the societal stigmatization of overweight children. Today, about one in three American children are overweight or obese (" Flass"). Overweight is generally defined as having more body fat than is optimally healthy, and obesity itself is defined as having excess body fat (" Childhood Obesity"). Growing up, children tend to eat what their parents eat. Nowadays, more parents are leading unhealthy lifestyles for their children. To stop childhood obesity, parents desperately need to make changes to promote more healthy lifestyles. The first change begins with food itself. As toddlers, they are just learning to communicate and explore, but eating is one of the first things they will overcome (" Tzou"). It is extremely important that a healthy lifestyle is introduced at this young of an age. Unfortunately, America has become a country that lives in a hectic, fast paced society. This greatly impacts the need for convenience, especially when it comes to food. When people across the country are looking for a quick, easy meal to grab on the go, stopping for fast food becomes the common solution. With the hectic lives of many parents and their children, fast food is being served instead of a well balanced meal. The consumption of fast foods leads to consuming higher amounts of calories, fat, sugars, and carbohydrates (" Fast Food Statistics"). Another way that parents are allowing their children to eat unhealthy is from the groceries they are going out and buying. Instead of buying nutritious items, they are purchasing more snack foods, or foods that are real high in

sugar. Constant snacking throughout the day can lead children uninterested in eating a proper lunch or dinner. To prevent this from happening, parents should try to stick to a consistent meal and snack schedule. They should also allow at least two hours between snacks and meals (“ Defining Overweight and Obesity”). Lastly, the amount of sugar-sweetened beverages such as juice and soda, that children are consuming needs to be controlled and limited. The majority of these drinks contain empty calories, meaning they provide simple sugars but little else in the way of nutrients. Instead, children should be offered more water and milk. The next thing that parents need to change is the amount of physical activity their children get. It is extremely important that children are getting the proper amount of exercise. With today’s technology, it is somewhat difficult for this to happen. Between the television, video games and computers, children are spending hours upon hours a day just sitting in front of a screen. Parents should be setting rules and limits on their child’s access to electronic media and devices and promoting physical activities. The outdoors is a great place to allow a child to run around and get plenty of exercise. Children should be encouraged to take a walk, ride a bike in the neighborhood, go to the park, or just play in the backyard. Although, some neighborhoods can be somewhat dangerous and not allow for outdoor activities, active indoor games can also be encouraged. The most effective way to influence a child is by showing them a healthy example. If children see their parents eating vegetables, being active, and limiting their time watching the television, there is a higher chance that they will do the same. This is why it is crucial for parents to make sure they themselves are leading a healthy lifestyle. It is important for

parents themselves to exercise in some way, every day. In their free time, they should be avoiding the television or too much computer time. Children are much less likely to turn electric devices on if they are off and can get involved in what their parents are doing. It is safe to say that the most immediate environment that will impact the child's dietary habits and preferences is inside their own home. For the first time in history, children could have a shorter lifespan than their parents. If parents do not take control of this epidemic, America's children are going to continue being obese and not live healthy lifestyles. Childhood obesity has many negative consequences on the body. Children who are obese are more likely to have high blood pressure, high cholesterol, insulin resistance and type 2 diabetes, breathing and joint problems, fatty liver disease, gallstones, and heartburn ("Flass"). Along with these, it can also cause many psychological problems, such as poor self-esteem, depression, and loneliness ("Flass"). A child's self-esteem is greatly influenced by how others respond to them. Since our culture looks down on people being overweight, overweight children tend to develop a low sense of self-esteem and self-worth. The number of children who are facing obesity is increasing day by day. The growing issue of childhood obesity can be slowed or stopped if parents begin to make healthier lifestyle choices. There are several components that play into childhood obesity, but the most important is the parents supervising their children at home in both food choices and physical activity. If parents reinforce a healthier lifestyle at home, then many obesity problems could be avoided. What children learn at home about eating healthy, exercising and making the right nutritional choices, will greatly benefit them later on in life.

Childhood obesity fits into the field of sociology because it is a growing problem in America and a serious health concern. There are a few sociological factors that have an impact on childhood obesity. When it comes to an individual's socioeconomic status, their ethnicity, income, and location can all help define it. Children that happen to be born into certain socioeconomic groups are at a higher risk to becoming obese. According to the Institute of Medicine Committee on Prevention of Obesity in Children and Youth, Hispanic, Native-American and African-American children have a higher prevalence of childhood obesity ("Valentine"). Children who are born into lower-income families are also at a higher risk to becoming obese. They may not have access to proper nutrition or health insurance. What is unknown about childhood obesity is if poverty really correlates. The United States is one of the wealthiest countries in the world in has increasing obesity rates. According to studies, with the economic growth in China and India, obesity rates have been quickly increasing ("Valentine").

References "

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