

# Preventing childhood obesity as a parent

[Life](#), [Childhood](#)



In today's society, childhood obesity is considered a serious public health issue and can be classified as an epidemic. In the United States alone, one in seven children ages 6-17 are considered to be obese. In the last 40 years in the United States the rate of childhood obesity has tripled. The main reason why childhood obesity has become such a serious issue is because children now days live more sedentary lifestyles. Children now days are bombarded with television advertisements urging them to eat foods high in fat and calories while staying inside and playing video games or watching television.

Childhood obesity does not only affect children in childhood but can cause a list of health issues in their adult lives also. When it comes to education regarding childhood obesity, the responsibility needs to be addressed by the parents, schools and the media. In the following paper, I am going to explain how childhood obesity can be controlled at home by the parents. Everything can be learned at home and applied to everyday life. I am going to give a brief overview of what the problems associated with childhood obesity are and what are the main contributing factors.

I will also show the long term effects of the issue and how it can also be addressed by the parents. Childhood obesity is costing the United States millions of dollars in health care expenses. In my opinion, I feel that this can be diverted by simple education from the parents. According to the article Facts about Childhood Obesity and Over-weightiness, obese children are statistically not active and consume diets that are high in fat. Most physicians use what they call a Body Mass Index Scale (BMI) to calculate how overweight a child is. Children who are over a 30 when it comes to BMI are considered obese. In order to calculate a person including a child's BMI, you

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would have to divide their weight in kilograms by the square of their height in meters (Mokdad,). When it comes to weight gain among children, you have to factor in many things such poor dietary habits, genetic makeup, familylifestyle, socioeconomic status and a child's ethnicity. Obesity is more prevalent among Hipic, African-American and American Indian children, particularly girls (Mayohealth. org). When it comes to children who suffer from obesity most are not overeaters.

The main cause of their weight gain is that the majority of the foods they consume contain high amounts of calories. When it comes to consuming excess calories, just an additional 200 calories a day can cause excess weight gain in children and add up to half a pound of fat a week. Although foods high in calories are partially to blame, soft drinks and fruit flavored beverages with high levels of sugar content also are a main cause of weight gain in children. In a recent study, it shows the average teenager in the United States today consumes an average of 65 gallons of sugary soft drinks annually.

The number is doubled in elementary school age children and the number in general has tripled in the past two decades. When it comes to the issue of childhood obesity, diet is not the only factor contributing to the problem. Many physicians and child psychologist also blame the increase television viewing and a child's more sedentary lifestyle. When it comes to watching television it does not require a large expenditure of energy and is usually accompanied by high-calorie foods. The American Heart Association reports that on average, a child watches a total of 17 hours of television a week.

This report does not include the time spent playing both video and computer games. In one study performed by the American Heart Association, they found that a child who watches more than five hours of television a day have a greater risk of weight gain than children who watched less than two. (Mayohealth. org) Along with sedentary lifestyles, the addition of fast food can lead to obesity in children. As you drive in any town and city located in the United States, the one thing you will notice is that there is a fast food chain on almost every corner.

Along with a fast food chain on every street corner, children watch television that are filled with commercial and advertisements showing their newest food selections. Many of these commercials have been geared toward children and can be associated with the rise of childhood obesity. In a recent study, researchers have found out that families that choose fast food as a meal three or more times a week do run a higher risk of obesity and larger BMI's. When it comes to all fast food chains, the one thing they all have in common is that every kid's meal comes with a choice of a boys or girls toy.

The other thing they have in common is the absence of fresh fruits, vegetables and whole grain. The absence of these healthy choices can make the effects of the burgers and fries that much more severe. In order to solve the problem of fast food, parents can balance a burger with regular exercise. With this combination, you can balance fast food with healthy choices. In a 1996 U. S. Surgeon General's Report regarding fitness, nearly half of young people ages 12 to 21 years of age are not physically active.

The American College of Sports Medicine reports that, due to financial constraints, only one-third of schools now offer physical education classes and many children today find team sports too competitive or costly to join. (Mayohealth.org) Physical education and organized sports not only provide children with an active lifestyle, but it also teaches them discipline. Although it is important for schools to provide young children with sports and physical education, the main responsibility lies at home with the parents.

The effects of childhood obesity do not just end when the child grows into an adult but can cause further health issues in the future. Childhood obesity has been linked to hypertension, cardiovascular disease and diabetes. Being extremely overweight and not active as a child causes the buildup of excess fat which circulates the blood and eventually turns into plaque. The plaque caused by this excess fat begins to slowly accumulate in arteries which causes a strain on the veins. The accumulation of this plaque can occur early in childhood and could lead to heart disease or a heart attack as an adult. The distribution of fat in the body has an important effect on one's blood pressure.

Hypertension is a chronic medical condition in which the systemic arterial blood pressure is elevated. Young overweight adults between the ages 20-45; are six times more likely to have hypertension than normal weight peers the same age. This number is increased if an adult grew up as an obese child. An accumulation of fat results in the release of fatty acids into veins which causes an excess of hepatic synthesis of triglycerides, insulin resistance and hyperinsulinemia. The Journal of the American Medical

Association Volume. #282) Along with heart disease, diabetes is another health issue associated with early childhood obesity. Obesity increases the risk of non-insulin dependent diabetes and causes two different forms of the disease. One form of diabetes is the increased demand for insulin the other form is the resistance of insulin in an obese individual. Obesity causes a resistance to insulin that increases the insulin production to compensate the excess of glucose circulating in the blood.

This excess causes damage to beta cells in the pancreas, producing insulin. (The Journal of the American Medical Association Volume. #282) Along with physical and health issues, psychological issues are also associated with childhood obesity. In today's society a lot of emphasis has been placed on physical appearance. This is made evident in the media which portrays what they consider the ideal image of a person. These images make overweight people feel unattractive and unwanted. Many people in today's society assume that obese people are lazy, fat, gluttonous and unattractive.

It is because of these prejudices that cause children to feel rejected, shame and depression. Like health issues, psychological issues can also be carried over from childhood to adulthood. When it came to the treatment of childhood obesity, many thought it could be achieved through strict dieting and exercise. This was found to be unsuccessful in most cases due to the fact children did not have the support in order to accomplish this goal. A new treatment involving a family-based approach is now being introduced as possible treatment for childhood obesity.

These programs are more successful because they maintain or slowly help a child lose weight as he/she grows (Mellin). These programs focus on the entire family, promoting physical and emotional well being and not diet. In order to perform this type of treatment, medical professionals have to first do a bio-psychosocial assessment to see if there are any medical or psychosocial problems. (Mellin) Once this is established, they can then address the symptoms of obesity and the causes of the weight gain. When it comes to the issue of childhood obesity, it is important to involve the entire family in treating this problem.

Children need motivation and support from their family prior to the involvement of dieting or exercise. With a strong support structure, it allows children to feel they can accomplish anything. In my opinion childhood obesity is a serious problem because it affects all areas of today's society. Childhood obesity affects a person's health, psychological well-being, the medical field and the family. I feel that in today's society they many consider exercise, dieting and medication a quick fix in solving the problem.

I feel that the problem of childhood obesity can be resolved at home with proper education and support. All health problems in children that can be prevented starts with the parents prior to the involvement of anyone else. As a parent of an overweight child, the first thing you must do is set attainable goals. The most important thing is you have to learn how to walk before you can run. The benefits of setting attainable goals are that when an overweight child accomplishes the goals you have set it provides them with the motivation to accomplish more.

If you set the goal too high and the child does not accomplish them, it makes them discouraged and will make it harder for them to achieve more. I feel along with support and motivation, an overweight child needs proper education regarding proper diet. I feel that many parents today feed their children what they want because they feel it is making them happy. What parents have to understand is just because it makes them happy doesn't mean it is good for them. When feeding children full meals, a healthy diet containing less than 30% fat calories is considered sufficient in raising healthy child. Moran) Parents should also only offer snacks when the child is hungry. The most important rule when offering a child a snack is to make the snack healthy. Parents should offer their children fresh fruit, raw vegetables and water rather than sugary soft drinks. I feel that now days many parents use food as a reward rather than for nutritional purposes. In my opinion children should be praised verbally and not given snacks like dogs when they do something well. Verbal praise I feel works well especially when a child makes a healthy choice options.

Another way a parent could help children maintain a healthy body weight is to encourage the child to participate in sports for at least a half an hour a day (Levine). Parents should encourage children to be active and go outside to play. Parents should also participate and encourage their children to play organized sports. When parents are involved in their child's active lifestyle, children tend to see it all the way through. Parents should also limit children watching television and playing video games. Television and video should be used as a reward rather than a parenting tool.



When it comes to childhood obesity and many other childhood diseases, parents now days are more anxious to throw medication at it or go for the quick fix. In my opinion, before a child can even talk they learn from everything you teach them as a parent. The issue of childhood obesity is never going to go away but it can be curved with a simple lifestyle change. All the learning starts at home and all habits whether good or bad starts at home too. When it comes to the issue of childhood obesity, parents have to learn that they are the key to their child living a healthy lifestyle and growing into healthy adults.