

Living Healthy: Childhood Obesity

What is Childhood Obesity?

Obesity is defined as a BMI (body mass index) greater than 30. Overweight is a BMI between 25 and 29.9. Essentially, overweight and obese are measurements of excess body weight. [Click here to calculate BMI for children and teens, aged 2 – 19 years old.](#) This calculator provides BMI and the corresponding BMI-for-age percentile on a CDC BMI-for-age growth chart.

Childhood obesity has more than tripled in the past 30 years. Even in Colorado, a state well known for its active outdoor lifestyle, childhood obesity increased by 23 percent between 2003 and 2007. That's the second fastest increase in the nation.

Why does it matter?

- Obese youth are more likely to have risk factors for cardiovascular disease, such as high cholesterol or high blood pressure.
- Obese adolescents are more likely to have pre-diabetes, a condition in which blood glucose levels indicate a high risk for development of diabetes.
- Children and adolescents who are obese are at greater risk for bone and joint problems, sleep apnea, and social and psychological problems such as stigmatization and poor self-esteem.
- Children and adolescents who are obese are likely to be obese as adults and are therefore more at risk for adult health problems such as heart disease, type 2 diabetes, stroke, several types of cancer, and osteoarthritis.
- Overweight and obesity are associated with increased risk for many types of cancer, including cancer of the breast, colon, endometrium, esophagus, kidney, pancreas, gall bladder, thyroid, ovary, cervix, and prostate, as well as multiple myeloma and Hodgkin's lymphoma.

How do we prevent childhood obesity?

- Obesity is linked to many socioeconomic factors. Primarily it stems from taking in more calories than we burn. This may come in the form of eating too many prepackaged foods, fast food or from a lack of exercise. To combat obesity, it is important to try and make healthy food choices for every meal and to lead an active lifestyle.
- A healthy diet can include foods like lean meats, poultry and fish, beans, eggs, nuts, fruits, vegetables, whole grains and fat-free or low-fat milk and milk products.
- It is important to be active throughout the day. This can include simple things like a daily walk or taking the stairs instead of the elevator. Children should be encouraged to join sports and to get outside and play.
- Some tips for healthy eating include: Keep the refrigerator and pantry stocked with "grab and go" snacks such as apples, berries, raw nuts, low-fat yogurt, cottage cheese and dried fruit. This makes it easy for children to eat healthy snacks in place of other easy foods like chips and cookies.
- When dining out, watch portion size. Order a "lunch" portion or split the meal and eat half and take the other half home.
- If fast food is the only option, look for the menu choices that include vegetables and lean meats.

For further questions about childhood obesity, contact your family physician.

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References:

www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/obesity/facts.htm

<http://www.healthpolicysolutions.org/>

This information is provided as a public service by the Colorado Academy of Family Physicians. For more information about healthy eating, overeating and nutrition for kids, visit the American Academy of Family Physicians consumer website at www.familydoctor.org.