

Evaluating and Treating Obesity

Obesity is a health problem in which people have more body fat and weight than their bodies need. This handout will tell you about obesity and how we evaluate and help children who are obese.

WHAT IS OBESITY?

Obesity is a serious health problem in which children or teenagers have more body fat than their bodies need. This increases the risk of conditions like heart disease, diabetes and high blood pressure.

HOW DO WE EVALUATE A CHILD WHO IS OVERWEIGHT OR OBESE?

We figure out if a person is obese by calculating his or her **Body Mass Index**, or **BMI**. The BMI is a measure of the amount of body fat in relation to a person's age and height. It is used to help determine how serious a weight problem is, the likelihood that your child's weight could lead to other health problems and if other testing should be done.

WHY IS MY CHILD SEEING A PEDIATRIC ENDOCRINOLOGIST FOR HIS OR HER WEIGHT?

We see children with weight concerns for 4 reasons. These reasons are:

- **Poor diet**

Many children who are obese might have gained extra weight because they eat more calories than they should for their age or they drink a lot of soda or juice with extra sugar. We can help you figure out the right number of calories and the types of food and drinks that your child should have for his or her age.

- **Not enough exercise**

Children who are overweight or obese might have gained extra weight because they do not get enough exercise. We can help you figure out how much exercise your child should have every day.

- **Problems with the body's endocrine system**

A small number of children who are obese have problems with their endocrine systems. The endocrine system helps control hormones in the body. We can help you figure out if there are any problems with your child's endocrine system.

- **Other health conditions**

Children who are overweight or obese have a higher risk of developing other health conditions that are associated with weight gain. Some of these health conditions are:

- High cholesterol or high levels of fat in the blood
- Type 2 diabetes
- High blood pressure
- Fat build up in the liver
- Problems with kidneys, like bedwetting
- Problems with bones or joints
- Sleep apnea (trouble breathing while sleeping)
- Skin problems, like stretch marks or dark, rough skin around the arms or neck
- Late puberty in boys
- Early puberty in girls
- Irregular periods, unwanted hair or acne (pimples) in girls

HOW DO WE TREAT CHILDREN WHO ARE OBESE?

The most effective way to help children who are obese is for the whole family to make changes in lifestyle and eating habits. Changes that help include:

- Getting rid of junk food, soda and sugary juices at home
- Having fruits and vegetables with meals
- Making meal portions smaller
- Eating meals with less fat
- Increasing the amount of exercise your child has every day
- Decreasing the amount of time that your child spends watching T.V. or playing video games
- Making sure your child's bedroom or sleeping areas don't have a T.V.
- Helping your child get enough sleep

The good news for families with children who have weight problems is that children are still growing. Children who are still growing do not need to lose much weight. Instead, they need to stop gaining weight until they stop growing. Children who have already reached their adult height might need to lose weight. We can help make a plan for weight loss that is steady and that your child can maintain.

Your child's medical team can help you and your child make healthy changes that help with weight loss. This team might include your child's primary care provider, a pediatric endocrinologist, a nutritionist and someone who will help with physical activity. The medical team will also help make sure your child doesn't have other medical problems that we need to treat.

HOW CAN I PREVENT MY CHILD FROM BECOMING OBESE?

The best way to prevent your child from becoming obese to have a healthy lifestyle yourself. Staying active, eating a healthy diet and getting enough sleep are important for preventing extra weight gain.

WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE ABOUT HEALTHY LIFESTYLES?

You can learn more about healthy lifestyles at these websites:

- **Let's Move!**
This website can help you plan health meals and add exercise and playtime to your child's day.
www.letsmove.gov
- **Choose My Plate**
This website can help you plan healthy meals, learn more about portion sizes and give you tips on managing your child's weight. www.choosemyplate.gov

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Pediatric Endocrine and Diabetes Center For more information please call

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