

Waging War Against Child Obesity



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The problem of childhood obesity in the United States has grown considerably in recent years. Between 16 and 33 percent of children and adolescents are obese.

Obesity is among the easiest medical conditions to recognize but most difficult to treat. Childhood obesity is particularly troubling because the extra pounds often start kids on the path to health problems that were once confined to adults, such as diabetes, high blood pressure and high cholesterol.

What is Obesity?

A few extra pounds do not suggest obesity. However they may indicate a tendency to gain weight easily and a need for changes in diet and/or exercise. Generally, a child is not considered obese until the weight is at least 10 percent higher than what is recommended for their height and body type.

What Causes Obesity?

The causes of obesity are complex and include genetic, biological, behavioral and cultural factors. Basically, obesity occurs when a person eats more calories than the body burns up. Although certain medical disorders can cause obesity, less than 1 percent of all obesity is caused by physical problems. Obesity in childhood and adolescence can be related to:

- *poor eating habits*
- *overeating or bingeing*
- *lack of exercise*
- *family history of obesity*
- *medical illnesses (endocrine, neurological problems)*
- *medications (steroids, some psychiatric medications)*
- *stressful life events or changes (separations, divorce, moves, deaths, abuse)*
- *family and peer problems*
- *low self-esteem*
- *depression or other emotional problems*

Ways to Overcome Obesity

- *start a weight-management program*
- *change eating habits (eat slowly, develop a routine)*
- *plan meals and make better food selections (eat less fatty foods, avoid junk and fast foods)*
- *control portions and consume less calories*
- *increase physical activity (especially walking) and have a more active lifestyle*
- *know what your child eats at school*
- *eat meals as a family instead of while watching television or at the computer*
- *do not use food as a reward*
- *limit snacking*

If you eat well, exercise regularly, and incorporate healthy habits into your family's daily life, you're modeling a healthy lifestyle for your kids that will last. Talk to them about the importance of eating well and being active, but make it a family affair that will become second nature for everyone. Most of all, let your kids know you love them — no matter what their weight — and that you want to help them be happy and healthy.

Source: Mayo Clinic