

Childhood Obesity: A Growing Problem

Obesity among children and teens is a major public health concern, with about quarter of youth affected. Addressing this issue requires a different approach than for adults.

For starters, determining whether a child or teen is overweight requires a different version of the commonly used Body Mass Index (BMI) test. To calculate, visit the CDC's Child and Teen BMI Calculator (<http://apps.nccd.cdc.gov/dnpabmi/>). A regular check-up with your pediatrician is the best way to figure out if your child is at a healthy weight.

Causes and Risk Factors:

As with adults, young people who consume too many calories while also not getting enough exercise are more likely to develop weight problems.

Being in an environment that lacks healthy food options areas to play and be active are also risk factors.

Parents who are themselves overweight or obese due to lifestyle habits are more likely to raise children who will also develop these issues.

Obesity can be caused or worsened by certain genetic and biological factors, although you need to consult a physician to determine this.

Consequences of Child/Teen Obesity:

The risks caused by becoming overweight at a young age are similar to those for adults - obese children are more likely to have heart and respira-



tory problems, high blood pressure, joint problems, liver and gastrointestinal diseases, type 2 diabetes, and sleeping problems, to name just a few.

Studies have shown that at least 70% of obese youth had one risk factor for cardiovascular disease, while almost 40% had two such risk factors.

Juvenile obesity also tends to worsen with age: overweight children are more likely to be severely overweight when they become adults, and thus will be even more vulnerable to obesity-related health problems.

Finally, there is increased risks of social and psychological problems, such as discrimination and low self-esteem, which can follow a child well into adulthood.

What to do?

First of all, set the example. Your children look up to you as a model to follow. If you're not taking care of your weight, eating well, or exercising, they will be less likely to do the same.

Teaching them the right habits can go a long weight. Play sports together, eat a healthy family meal, and encourage them to take care of their health.

Limit the time your child watches television. Make sure they get restful sleep, since that reduces weight gain. En-

gage with your local school, day care center, and community to promote healthier environments and food options.

Learn more at <http://www.cdc.gov/obesity/childhood/>

HIGHLIGHTS

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