



Obesity

The National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey found in 1994 that 10% of children between 6 and 12 years old were obese and 20% between 12 and 17 were obese. In 1996 22% of children at 6 years of age were obese and 31% of children at 15 were obese. **THESE STATISTICS ARE ALARMING** and based on these it can be expected that this will be the first generation that will not live longer than their parents. How Sad!

At the same time the same institute found that between the years of 1976 and 1980 14.5% of adults were obese. Then between 1988 to 1994 that figure rose to 22.5% of adults being obese. By 1999 this figure rose another 6% to 28.5%.

The **long term complications** of obesity are huge. They include **Type II Diabetes, hypertension, elevated fats in the blood, intestinal trouble, sleep trouble, orthopedic problems and even psychiatric problems**. The toll on the body is so huge that it takes years off one's life.

Obesity Is Not Fair

Having said that maybe we can get some valuable facts out in the open and learn what to do to prevent or to treat childhood obesity.

How Do I Know If My Child Is Overweight Or Obese?

Ask your doctor to confirm your suspicions, but there is an easy calculation to do. Measure your child's height in inches and take your child's weight in pounds. Here is the formula. You are calculating the Body Mass Index.

Weight in Pounds

(Height in Inches x Height in Inches)/703

If this "higher" math is too difficult, then look on the [Body Mass Index](#) page, on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website (www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/bmi/calc-bmi.htm).

The Body Mass Index should be less than 25. Between 25 and 30 is considered overweight and over 30 is considered obese.

So What Do I Do Now?

The idea of putting a child on a diet seems harsh or even impossible. However the consequences of



being overweight are huge. Remember that your child did not get there overnight and will not get out of this overnight. Only with life-style changes can you make a difference. Weight is fairly simple. There are 2 variables, what you take in (the food that you eat) and what you put out (the exercise that you do). The only two things you can do is decrease the intake and increase the output to lose weight.

First Approach should include decreasing high risk habits. For most children this will take care of the problem and no fad diet, or calorie counting will be necessary.

The American Academy of Pediatrics has posted the top 10 points that lead to obesity. Correct these first!

1. Buy and serve more **FRUITS AND VEGETABLES**. It is recommended that you have 5 servings of fruits and vegetables a day. They can be a healthy snack and have far less calories than chips or fries.
2. **AVOID SOFT DRINKS**. Soft drink consumption is associated with obesity. The more you drink the greater the risk. One can of soda a day over a year's time will increase your weight about 5 pounds.
3. Encourage **WATER** or **LOW FAT MILK** (after age 5) instead of juice or soft drinks. Fruit juice might be healthier than soda but is still high in sugar. Water is best, after the 8 to 12 ounces of low fat milk recommended daily.
4. **EAT BREAKFAST EVERYDAY**. Obesity is associated with skipping meals. If you skip a meal you will become more hungry and the studies show you are more likely to over eat the next meal. Never skip breakfast or any meal. You want to eat a light breakfast? Okay, then have an apple for breakfast.
5. **AVOID FAST FOOD**. Every meal eaten at McDonalds or Burger King doubles your calories for that meal; it is like eating 2 meals in one. No more than once a week; and even that is too often for a child who wants to lose weight.
6. Serve **SMALL SERVINGS** and allow your child to ask for seconds if he or she wishes. You have better control that way. Encourage your child to try different foods. If he or she resists, do not fight, just place the new food on their plate and say nothing. Over time most children will try new foods if they are presented to them.
7. **DO NOT USE FOOD AS A REWARD**. "If you eat your vegetables then you can have a nice big piece of cake."
8. Start an **EXERCISE PROGRAM**. Make it for the family. Walk, run, ride bikes or swim. Any exercise is good. 30 to 45 minutes a day, 3-4 days a week is best to start. Even if your child is already very active, if they are overweight then more activity will help them. Do not make excuses why you cannot do this.
9. **LIMIT TV**, Video Game playing, and Computer time to an hour a day. It is not healthy for other reasons but it makes our kids sedentary which leads to obesity.
10. **SUPPORT** your child through this, it is difficult. Many children who are overweight will develop anxiety or depression as a result. Without your support this is more likely to happen.

These recommendations are simple. However they run counter to the constant barrage in the media, retail and our culture. Making these changes is easier than most fad diets, and can result in healthy life-



styles lasting life spans. Without making life-style changes your child is doomed to living a shorter life than you will enjoy. How sad. A huge step backwards because we will not do 10 simple things.

Some children have more serious weight problems. If the above 10 point plan does not improve your child's weight then seek out professional help, but do not seek out other options until you have tried the 10 things listed above. This is cornerstone to weight control. Talk with your child's doctor. You might want to consider Weight Watchers as it is a life-style changing plan for weight loss. Fad diets are discouraged for kids and anyone else! It is hard to sustain the benefits of them. Only through life-style changes can you make huge differences in weight control.

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