

Childhood Obesity

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The percentage of overweight children in the United States is growing at an alarming rate, with 1 out of 3 kids now considered overweight or obese. Many kids are spending less time exercising and more time in front of the TV, computer, or video-game console.

Today's busy families have fewer free moments to prepare nutritious, home-cooked meals. From fast food to electronics, quick and easy is the reality for many people in the new millennium.

Preventing kids from becoming overweight means adapting the way your family eats and exercises, and how you spend time together. Helping kids lead healthy lifestyles begins with parents who lead by example.

Obesity increases the risk for serious health conditions like type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol—all once considered exclusively adult diseases. Obese kids may also be prone to low self-esteem that stems from being teased, bullied, or rejected by peers. They often develop unhealthy eating disorders and are at risk for depression and substance abuse. Their future health

and quality of life can be greatly affected by obesity.

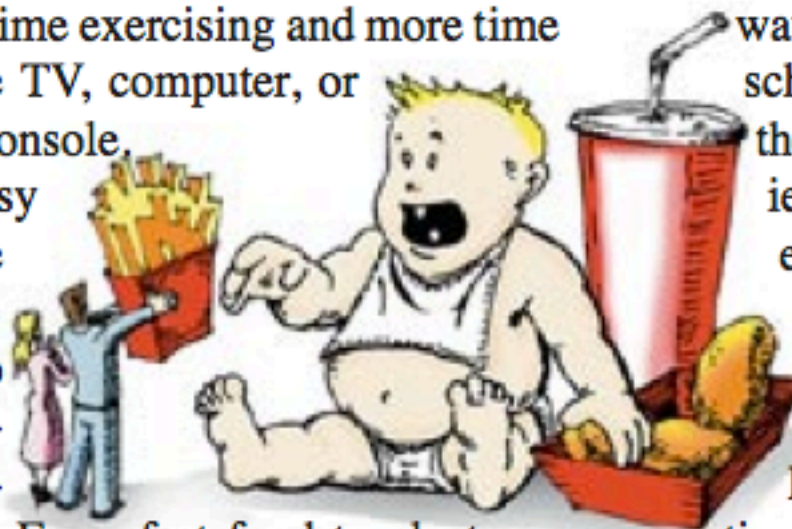
Much of what we eat is quick and easy—from fat-laden fast food to microwave and prepackaged meals. Daily schedules are so jam-packed that there's little time to prepare healthier meals or to squeeze in some exercise.

Portion sizes, in the home and out, have grown greatly.

Plus, now more than ever life is sedentary—kids spend more time playing with electronic devices, from computers, to handheld video games, than actively playing outside. Television is a major culprit.

Kids younger than 6 spend an average of 2 hours a day in front of a screen, mostly watching TV, DVDs, or videos. Older kids and teens spend almost 4 hours a day watching TV, DVDs, or videos. When computer use and video games are included, time spent in front of a screen increases to over 5 and 1/2 hours a day.

Many kids don't get enough physical activity. More and more schools are eliminating PE programs or cutting down
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the time spent on fitness building activities. One study showed that gym classes offered third-graders just 25 minutes of vigorous activity each week.

Current guidelines recommend that kids over two years of age get at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity on most, preferably all, days of the week.

Genetics also play a role. Genes help determine body type and how your body stores and burns fat just like they help determine other traits. Genes alone, however, cannot explain the current obesity crisis. Because both genes and habits can be passed down from one generation to the next, multiple members of a family may struggle with weight.

People in the same family tend to have similar eating patterns, maintain the same levels of physical activity, and adopt the same attitudes toward being overweight. Studies have shown that a child's risk of obesity greatly increases if one or more parent is overweight or obese.

Model a healthy lifestyle by eating well, exercising regularly, and incorporating healthy habits into your family's daily life. Most of all, let your kids know that you love them - no matter what their weight.

