



## ***Obesity: A Weighty Health Risk***

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Annual deaths for adults due to obesity are approximately 300,000 a year. The number is lower for children, but the fact is, childhood obesity is increasing at an alarming rate. Also frightening, it is now more common for children to be diagnosed with type II diabetes by the age of ten. In the past decade, the average age and time span for type II diabetes was in the high thirties and early forties. Hispanic boys and girls are reported to be at a higher risk than others. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) estimate that 23% of the children in U.S. (one out of four) are overweight and are at risk for diabetes.

Obesity is associated with low self-esteem, depression, and loss of control. Its causes may be linked to genetic heredity and a lack of education within the family about healthy eating and exercise routines. These activities should be implemented as early as the infant stage of rolling over, crawling, walking etc. Children should be encouraged to maintain healthy practices by being physically active from the beginning of life; not enforcing this in the early stages in life can have a detrimental effect on the future health of your child. Have your children walk to school instead of driving them or have your child/children ride bikes or skateboard to school. Try simple activities throughout the day such as walking, running, dancing, playing, swimming, and using the stairs or stairways instead of the escalator. Also, try having your child/children play outdoors, and have them climb, run, and roller blade a minimum of one hour per day, instead of watching television or sitting in front of the computer, even giving them weekly chores such as raking, mowing, and vacuuming can assist in healthy living. Just by keeping children active each day in one shape or form can make a world of difference.

Fast food consumption has been on the rise. The United States, as a whole, eats more fat in larger portions. Unfortunately, we get in the habit of super-sized combo meals (American's spend over \$110 billion on fast food annually – this is half of our own money being spent on food away from home), etc., which all consist of almost 50% more fat. Eating habits need to change, not only to low-fat and healthier fast food options, but also to nonfat dairy items and larger portions of fruits and vegetables. Only 3% of us meet 4 out of 5 Federal Food Guide Pyramid guidelines for our daily intake. This is astonishing! Some fruits which contain high amounts of sugar are not recommended for diabetic children. If needed, a great option is to get a nutritionist to monitor childcare health, and for the whole family to change their eating habits and eat healthier as a group. It is not recommended to “outcast” your child in order to change what he/she eats - chances are this will lead to short-term success instead of a long-term way of life. Don't deprive your child of ice cream or some treats; we all need to be rewarded on occasion, and not honoring cravings can be unrealistic and unfair. Pack children's lunches with healthy snacks and when you cook, try to plan for smaller portions. Rather than eating large portions in one sitting, finish up leftovers. Try consistently using the same foods to make meals - children aren't as picky as we think.

I highly recommend getting in the habit, when you do go out together, of asking a family member to share a meal, or ordering smaller portions from the children's menu. It may be hard at first, but after a few weeks it will seem easier and you will see the portions desired are much smaller. Simple ideas to minimize appetites can be as simple as drinking water before your meal and encouraging your child and yourself to drink eight glasses of water a day. It sounds somewhat odd, but teaching children to slow down when eating and counting chews has personally helped me eat less, and forced me to take the time to realize I am already full and satisfied. Many children skip breakfast, the most important meal of the day. In fact, approximately 75% of people who eat breakfast loose weight easier and are healthier for

it. Try to have your children eat only when hungry and snack on healthy foods throughout the day. It becomes a habit to order a soft drink, but encourage your children to think it through and order a juice or water instead. It makes a big difference when your child sits down to eat three meals daily. They will be less likely to desire a big meal.

Children need time to burn calories. It is best not to eat 2-3 hours before bedtime, so you have an opportunity to burn calories and digest food, which in turn will help your child sleep better. Eating before bed induces quicker weight gain and children wake up more tired since the body works through the night to digest food. Stay away from caffeine - it makes a big difference to drink water, warm milk, etc. before bed for my life personally, and will for your child/children as well.

These unhealthy habits and patterns may lead to diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, joint pain and discomfort, heart disease, strokes, cancer and other serious causes, according to the California Department of Education. There is proof that students achieve more academically, when physically fit. The California education code requires physical education for all student grades up until 9<sup>th</sup> grade and an additional year in high school. We can't rely on the school programs to meet the physical needs of our children; all families need to plan activities to be physically fit together, such as walking and talking throughout the day. Less than 1/3 of the population take the 30 minutes out of their week to get a moderate amount of physical activity. In fact, 40% of us have absolutely no leisure time physical activity at all. It is not difficult to see why so many kids are on the path to being overweight. In a public school classroom, about 50% of the students are overweight. The culture of overeating, poor food quality and sedentary lifestyles is pervasive. This is a great way to spend time together, while being physically active. Run in the park with the dog, bike ride as a family on the weekend, etc. Find activities that work for you and your family.

Engaging in outside sports is a great opportunity for your child to exercise, interact socially, and be healthier. Some students may not like to compete or feel athletic; individual sports such as track could be a better option than team sports, like soccer and softball. Track is a great example of an individual sport where the focus is not so much on competitive running, but on reaching PR (personal records). Action sports such as skateboarding are popular; these kinds of activities are a great way to allow children to do what they want without any coaches or peer pressure. It involves doing what they love while spending time with their friends, and staying healthy and active without realizing it. Participating in sports not only keeps children healthier and happier, but also teaches children the importance of goal setting, motivation, dedication and teamwork. This truly is an integral part of what children need to learn at a very young age to make a world of difference in adulthood and continue this pattern from generation to generation.

Keep in mind that growth spurts can also affect performance; about the time children reach puberty, physical activity can become a bit more of a challenge. When a child grows, bones grow faster than muscles and tendons. During the ages of 15-18, growth will stabilize, but joints, especially the knees, can be at risk. This can result in lack of coordination and loss of skills, which can lead to feeling discouraged at sports. Let children choose their own sports and try others. Some parents feel it is important to stick with the same sport; if it is not the child's decision and interest, it will not be as meaningful as a long-term activity. This can lead to frustration and lack of focus. It's a good idea to let children explore other options in their physical career. Parents may want children to follow in their footsteps of being a softball or football player, etc., but remember, this may be your passion and dream, but not your child's. It is important for young people to believe they can accomplish and achieve whatever they desire, while feeling confident in their own interests and abilities. This in itself will lead to high self-esteem, which decreases the risk of obesity, and encouraging a healthier lifestyle.

