

# My Child is Overweight



## How does my doctor know that my child is overweight?

**B**y calculating the Body Mass Index (BMI) which is a key index for relating body weight to height or by using normal growth curves and plotting the weight for height. If your child's BMI is above the 85th percentile he/she is

overweight and at risk for obesity. If your child's BMI is over the 95th percentile he/she meets the medical definition of obesity.

## How did my child become overweight?

Eating too many calories and not exercising enough has led to your child becoming overweight. Habits such as drinking popsoft drinks, eating while watching TV, eating out too frequently and eating foods that are high in fat and calories (fast foods) contribute to an intake of too many calories. An inactive lifestyle with lots of time spent in front of TV, computer or game screens encourages excessive eating, while limiting exercise.

## But as children are growing, is it safe for my child to lose weight?

It is important to develop healthy eating habits in childhood that will continue on into adulthood. Growth requires calories but not excessive calories. Growth requires good nutrition, not a diet high in fats and empty calories. Exercise is also important as it helps to strengthen bones and improve lean body mass.

If you are overweight as a child you are at risk for being overweight as an adult. It is easier to lose weight as a child with the caloric demands of growth than as an adult without the caloric requirements for growth.

Studies have shown that diet alone is not successful. Therefore, the emphasis is on increasing exercise together with a nutritionally complete low fat diet with few empty calories rather than a severely restricted diet. Growth should be monitored while dieting.

## Can my child take a pill to lose weight?

Most diet pills are harmful and do not result in long term weight loss. Losing weight through improved diet and exercise is the healthy way to go. Improving muscle mass will make it easier to lose weight. Changing your life style is the best way to lose weight and ensure that the weight stays off.

## How can I help my child lose weight?

In order to lose weight, your child has to take in fewer calories than she/he uses. To lose a pound per week the calorie intake would need to be decreased by about 500 calories per day. This is very hard for most of us to do. However, if one includes 1 to 1 1/2 hours of vigorous exercise per /day which uses up to 250- 300 calories per day, then the decrease in dietary calories will only need to be about 200-250 calories per day. Using this approach, in one year your child can lose up to 50 pounds. Encourage your child to make healthy food choices and to exercise

## How do I cut my child's diet by 250 calories/day?

First, examine your child's eating habits. A 3 day calorie count can be done to assess what your child is eating and how many calories he/ she is consuming. Look for hidden calories. Many cookbooks have the calorie contents of foods listed in the appendix in the back of the book. Most fruits and vegetables are about 80 calories per serving. However if a vegetable is cooked in butter you have to add 90 calories per pat of butter. Read the labels to find out the serving size and the number of calories per serving. Fats are the most energy dense foods with 9 calories/gram, whereas carbohydrates (starches - vegetables and grains, and sugars) are 4 calories/gram. Protein is 4 calories/gram. An egg is about 60 calories and supplies high quality protein. Some meats are higher in calories because meat may have more fat.

## Dietary trouble spots

Soft drinks (carbonated beverages) are 160-180 calories per can. Some flavored waters are 300 calories per bottle. Fast food like McDonalds is high in fat. For example a Big Mac is 590 calories, a large French Fries is 540 calories and an M & M McFlurry is 630 calories. This adds up to 1760 calories which is nearly the amount of calories for a whole day in one meal. However, if you have a McDonald's hamburger (280), a small fries (210) and skim milk (90) that would add up to 580 calories which is much more reasonable. Foods that are high in calories and low in nutritional value (empty calories) such as cake, candy, potato and corn chips, cookies, honey, jam, jelly, pastries, pies, sweet toppings, syrup, fruit-flavored drinks and soft drinks should be avoided.

## #1 target – reduced daily calorie intake

### *New Dietary guidelines*

The new dietary guidelines are in line with a healthy diet that works well to ensure that all nutrients are met in a low calorie diet that is compatible with growth and weight loss.

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**Take more More fruits Fruits and Vegetables.** Fruits and vegetables are low in calories and provide many of the vitamins and minerals that are good for you. Fruits are sweet and filling and don't increase your need for more food. Raw vegetables are better than cooked ones. The more colorful the vegetable the better they are. Watch the butter and high calorie dips and sauces.

Limit fruit to 3 pieces per day.

Limit fruits and vegetables to 4-5 cups per day.

**More whole grains.** Whole grains are tasty, filling and good for you. Choose whole grains such as: whole wheat or multigrain bread, brown rice, whole wheat pasta, whole grain cereals, whole grain crackers or whole wheat tortillas.

Take 2-3 servings per day

**Milk. 2-8 years:** 2 - 3 glasses of low fat or fat free milk/day. **9 + years:** 3 - 4 glasses per day. Milk provides calcium, vitamin D and other nutrients. Low fat milk is a great source of protein and has few calories. A glass of skim milk has about 90 calories.

### Helpful Hints to get my child's diet under control.

- ◆ Drink 2-4 cups of skim milk per day
- ◆ Eat lean meats such as chicken, turkey or fish. Take a maximum of 2 servings per day.
- ◆ Eat at least 5 servings of fruit and vegetables every day. Eat a rainbow. Colorful foods often have important antioxidants.
- ◆ Limit snacks
- ◆ If your child must have ice cream, get frozen yogurt which has about 100 calories less per serving than real ice cream. Other alternatives included sherbet which is made with skim milk and sorbets which are from juice. Check the labels.
- ◆ Drink 6 - 8 cups of water each day. Avoid soft drinks and limit drinks such as fruit and energy drinks. You can replace with diet soft drinks form time to time. Be careful about sugary juices as they make you thirstier and they can have a lot of calories.
- ◆ Avoid eating after 7 pm if you are dieting. This gives the body time to use the fat stores for energy.
- ◆ The more processed the food, the less nutritious it is and the more calories it provides.
- ◆ Food is not a reward, loving attention is.
- ◆ If your child is stressed out or depressed, encourage your child to try exercising. This will raise his/ her spirits and he/ she will be proud of him/ herself.
- ◆ Decrease the amount of fast food that your child and the family eat. These foods are often full of calories and fat and the portion sizes are way too large. If you must eat out, then eat half the meal and bring the rest home to enjoy the following day.
- ◆ **Do allow your children to say they are full**

## Diet NO NOs

### Soft Drinks

180 calories per 8 oz can. The sugar and caffeine make you hungry and you want to eat more. They are also bad for your teeth, increase your risk for gallstones and kidney stones, diabetes and osteoporosis and decrease your consumption of milk/dairy. There is no nutritional risk from eliminating soft drinks from your diet.

### Fats

- ◆ Avoid Trans fats and Hydrogenated fats. They increase the bad cholesterol (LDL) and the decrease the good cholesterol (HDL).
- ◆ Avoid saturated fat which is the main contributor to blood cholesterol and hardening of the arteries.
- ◆ Avoid foods with high levels of cholesterol (animal fat has cholesterol, vegetable fat does not).
- ◆ Limit cheese, bacon, fried foods, gravy and sour cream. A McDonald's hamburger provides 260 calories and with cheese the calories increase to 310.
- ◆ If your family has chips, substitute baked chips.
- ◆ Avoid chewy candy. They have hydrogenated fats and trans fats. Eat hard candy if you must, but sugar makes you hungry quicker.
- ◆ If your child likes chocolate, then encourage him/ her to eat dark chocolate rather than milk chocolate. Dark chocolate has antioxidants that fight heart disease, cancer and aging without the fat.
- ◆ If your child likes cookies, then make them yourself. Stay away from margarine and use canola oil.
- ◆ Nuts are good, but they are high in calories, so limit the amount eaten and choose dry roasted nuts to avoid added calories.
- ◆ Portion size. Never eat an amount larger than you can hold in one hand.

**Check labels of prepared food and select those that are lower in fat, sodium and sugar and higher in fibre.**

### #2 target exercise goal

- 1) Put exercise into your child's schedule and set exercise goals
- 2) Aim for 90 minutes of vigorous activity
- 3) Exercise should be fun
- 4) Reward your child for exercising, but do not use food as a reward
- 5) Find something that your child can do on his/ her own

**Now with your child's diet in line, here comes the fun part. Get in shape.**

If your child hasn't been exercising and is out of shape you can still do something. Instead of exercising for the whole 60-90 minutes at once, your child can start with about 30 minutes 1-3 times per day and gradually build up. It all counts. Encourage your child to find an exercise that he/ she enjoys, that doesn't require special equipment or

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special clothes such as dancing, walking, biking, jump rope, skating, shooting baskets or running. The best physical activity is one that doesn't require a lot of equipment and fits with your life style. Consider input from a PE teacher, a personal trainer or children's focused gym. Figure out how to work this into your child's daily routine and include it on the calendar. Encourage regular exercise. Don't leave food around and don't allow your child to sit in front of a screen all day. Encourage your child to take up a hobby. Your child needs to get control of his/ her weight.

Exercise 60 minutes per day to maintain weight and 90 minutes per day to lose weight. If your child is very overweight walking is a good way to get started. Buy a pedometer that will tell your child how far he/ she has walked and how many calories have been used. Aim for about 10,000 steps per day which will result in weight loss. Encourage your child to take the stairs. Park the car a little further away. Walk to the mall. Walk the dog. Walk as a family. Swimming is excellent, but is a little harder to work into ones schedule. But if you have access, take advantage of swimming. It is easy on the joints. Encourage active play. Limit TV time and make a rule that there is no eating while watching TV. Limit time in front of the computer. Tie computer or TV time to activity so that if your child is active for an hour then he/ she can watch TV for an hour.

### Why should my child lose weight

Being overweight has been linked to many serious medical problems including:

- ◆ Diabetes Mellitus
- ◆ Heart disease
- ◆ Non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD) and gall stones
- ◆ Heartburn and gastroesophageal reflux disease
- ◆ Orthopedic problems
- ◆ Skin infections and poor wound healing
- ◆ Breathing problems, sleep apnoea and an increased risk of complications associated with anesthesia and surgery.
- ◆ Blood clots
- ◆ High blood pressure and heart disease
- ◆ Pseudotumor cerebri

### Should my child have an operation for Obesity?

Obesity can decrease life expectancy by 22%. Being overweight can make a child's every movement an effort and lead to a further decrease in physical activity. Being overweight can also lead to poor self-esteem and low social acceptance resulting in increased loneliness and additional intake of calories.

Simply losing weight can reverse many of the health risks and contribute to improved self-esteem.

This should be a last resort for a child who already is experiencing medical problems associated with morbid obesity

(BMI in the 40's or 50's). Taking the right steps with weight loss in childhood should prevent a child from needing this type of procedure.

This procedure is not without risk. Complications include leaks from the stomach, bleeding, blood clots, deficiencies of iron, calcium, Vitamin B1 and Vitamin B12, protein malnutrition, bowel obstruction, ulcers, gallstones, wound infections and even death. If surgery is needed, then one should try to wait until the child's growth is completed.

From more information or to locate a pediatric gastroenterologist in your area please visit our website at: [www.naspghan.org](http://www.naspghan.org)

### Helpful Web sites

- [www.actionforhealthykids.org](http://www.actionforhealthykids.org) or 1-800-416-5136
- [www.mypyramid.gov](http://www.mypyramid.gov)
- [www.myfitnessexpert.com](http://www.myfitnessexpert.com)
- [www.fitday.com](http://www.fitday.com) (online diary and calorie counter)
- [www.aap.org/obesity](http://www.aap.org/obesity)
- [www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/index\\_e.html](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/index_e.html)

**IMPORTANT REMINDER:** This information from the North American Society for Pediatric Gastroenterology, Hepatology and Nutrition (NASPGHAN) is intended only to provide general information and not as a definitive basis for diagnosis or treatment in any particular case. It is very important that you consult your doctor about your specific condition.

*My doctor says that my child is overweight.*

My child weighs \_\_\_\_\_ pounds.

My child's BMI is \_\_\_\_\_ percentile

My child should weigh \_\_\_\_\_ pounds.

That is \_\_\_\_\_ pounds overweight.

An appropriate caloric intake for my child is \_\_\_\_\_ calories.

*Exercise is an important part of the weight loss program and you/ you child should exercise at least an hour a day.*

The goal is to lose \_\_\_\_\_ pounds by \_\_\_\_\_.

Even if you don't reach this goal every pound that is lost is a step in the right direction.



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