

OBESITY IN CHILDREN

Why are overweight and obesity problems for children?

More children and teens are overweight or obese now than ever before. In the United States, nearly 1 out of every 3 children is overweight or obese. Children who are overweight or obese are at risk for serious health problems as they get older, including the following:

- Heart disease
- Diabetes
- High blood pressure
- High cholesterol
- Asthma
- Sleep apnea
- Some types of cancer

Severe obesity can cause liver problems and [arthritis](#). A child who has weight problems also may have low self-esteem, become depressed, be teased or bullied about his or her weight, feel bad about his or her body, or feel isolated or alone. These feelings can interfere with a child's ability to learn, make friends and interact with others.

Will my child outgrow his or her weight problem as he or she gets older?

Your child probably will not outgrow his or her weight problem unless you help your child learn to make healthier choices. Studies have shown that children who are overweight are also likely to be overweight adults. In one study, about 80% of children who were overweight at 10 to 15 years of age were obese when they reached age 25. In another study, researchers discovered that 25% of obese adults were overweight as children.

How can I tell if my child is overweight or obese?

Sometimes a child's weight problems are obvious. But because changes in weight are common as children grow, you may have trouble telling if your child is overweight.

Your family doctor can help determine whether your child has a weight problem by calculating his or her body mass index (BMI). The BMI is an approximate measure of body fat. It is based on your child's height and weight.

Many websites offer BMI calculators to help adults determine their BMIs. However, you should not use these calculators to measure your child's BMI. That's because children's BMI numbers are broken into categories called percentiles. Percentiles allow your doctor to compare your child's BMI with other children who are the same age, height and sex. If your child's BMI is higher than 85% of other children who are the same age, height and sex, he or she is considered overweight. If your child's BMI is higher than 95% of other children, he or she is considered obese.

What other tests may be needed?

Other tests usually aren't needed. If your doctor wants to confirm that the extra weight your child is carrying is related to too much body fat, he or she may do skin-fold thickness measurements.

Your doctor may do other tests to see whether another health problem could be causing your child's weight gain. Your doctor may suspect other health problems if your child has symptoms in addition to weight gain.

Could my child's weight problem be caused by a disease or hormone imbalance, or by a medicine he or she is taking?

Perhaps. Generally, diseases and hormone imbalances will cause other symptoms in addition to weight gain. Be sure to tell your family doctor if you have noticed any other unusual changes in your child, such as fatigue, constipation or dry skin. This information will help your doctor better evaluate your child's weight gain.

The doctor will want to know about any medicine your child is taking, including vitamins and herbal supplements. If your child's weight gain occurred after he or she began taking a medicine, share that information with your doctor. Some medicines can contribute to weight gain.

What can I do to help my overweight or obese child?

As a parent or primary caregiver, you have a lot of power. Children are much easier to influence than adults. Your child will follow your example, so strive to be a good role model. Teach your child how to eat healthy foods and stay active. Here are a few tips:

- Keep healthy snacks readily available, such as fruits like apples and bananas, and raw veggies like carrots and celery. Don't bring unhealthy foods into the home.
- Include plenty of low-fat proteins, vegetables and whole grains in the meals you make.
- Avoid fast-food dining.
- Choose the healthiest options available when at fast-food or sit-down restaurants.
- Limit time in front of the TV, computer or game station to no more than 1 to 2 hours every day.
- Encourage your child to be active. Aim for at least 1 hour of active play every day. Make physical activity a family affair by taking a walk, riding a bike or doing chores together.
- Be a good role model. Live what you teach by eating smart and exercising.