

Be Healthy, Not Heavy!

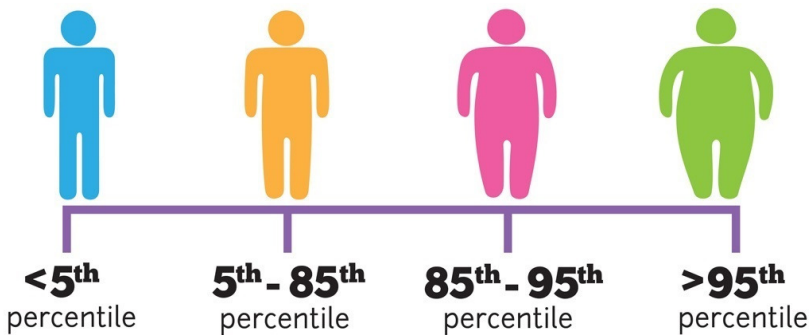


overweight or obese.

Overweight:
Having excess body weight for a particular height from fat, muscle, bone, water, or a combination of these factors.

Obesity:
Having excess body fat.

The BMI Scale



Symptoms

Not all children carrying extra kilos are overweight or obese. Some children have larger than average body frames. And children normally carry different amounts of body fat at the various stages of development. So you might not know just by looking at your child if his or her weight is a health concern.

Your child's doctor can help you figure out if your child's weight could pose health problems using growth charts and, if necessary, other tests.



CHILDHOOD OBESITY

Childhood obesity is a serious medical condition that affects children and adolescents. It occurs when a child is well above the normal weight for his or her age and height.



Childhood obesity is particularly troubling because the extra pounds often start children on the path to health problems that were once confined to adults, such as diabetes, high blood pressure and high cholesterol. Childhood obesity can also lead to poor self-esteem and depression.



Risk Factors

Many factors usually a combination increase your child's risk of becoming overweight.

Psychological factors. Some children overeat to cope with problems or to deal with emotions, such as stress, or to fight boredom. Their parents may have similar tendencies.

Family factors. If many of the groceries you buy are convenience foods — such as cookies, chips and other high-calorie items — this can contribute to your child's weight gain.

Socio-economic factors. Foods that won't spoil quickly — such as frozen meals, crackers and cookies often contain a lot of salt and fats. These foods are often less expensive or an easier option than fresher, healthier foods.

Diet. Regularly eating high-calorie foods such as fast foods, baked goods and vending machine snacks can easily cause your child to gain weight.

Lack of exercise. Children who don't exercise much are more likely to gain weight because they don't burn calories through physical activity.

Family history. If your child comes from a family of overweight people, he or she may be more likely to put on excess weight, especially in an environment where high-calorie food is always available and physical activity isn't encouraged.

Prevention

Whether your child is at risk of becoming overweight or currently at a healthy weight, you can take proactive measures to get or keep things on the right track.

Schedule yearly well-child

visits. Take your child to the doctor for well-child checkups at least once a year. During this visit, the doctor measures your child's height and weight and calculates his or her BMI. An increase in your child's BMI or in his or her percentile rank over one year is a possible sign that your child is at risk of becoming overweight.

Set a good example. Make sure you eat healthy foods and exercise regularly to maintain your weight. Then, invite your child to join you.

Avoid food-related power struggles with your child.

You might unintentionally lay the groundwork for such battles by providing or withholding certain foods — sweets, for instance — as rewards or punishments. As a general rule, don't use food as a reward or punishment.

Emphasize the positive.

Encourage a healthy lifestyle by highlighting the positive — the fun of playing outside or the variety of fresh fruit you can get year-round, and the benefits of exercise.

Be responsible about your own weight.

Obesity often occurs in several family members. If you need to lose weight, doing so will motivate your child to do likewise. Don't expect your child to do something you are unwilling to do for yourself.

Be patient. Many overweight children grow into their extra pounds as they get taller. Realize, too, that an intense focus on your child's eating habits and weight can easily backfire, leading a child to overeat even more.