

Obesity in Children

Background:

- Child Obesity is a modern health problem for children today. Children of all ages are gaining too much weight, and learning unhealthy eating habits and behaviors at an early age.
- It is found that the numbers and percentages of overweight children have doubled over the past thirty years. It is affecting children of all ages and ethnic groups. The most common reason for child obesity is due to unhealthy eating and daily life habits. Most adults who are overweight have children that become overweight. Also, when children are obese, they have a very high chance of becoming obese when they get older, but a small number of them do grow out of it. Obese children have a higher risk of developing heart disease, diabetes, along with other health issues when they are older.
- Many children now-a-days are definitely not receiving enough nutrients in daily meals and not engaging in enough physical activities. Obese children may not be as social as others. Some tend to become loners and become hesitant towards others because they are self-conscious about their weight. Doing this and not having a healthy lifestyle increases the chances of weight gain. Because of a child's weight, they may feel awkward to try to engage in physical activities because of judgments from peers, and this is part of the reason they become more obese and are unable to control it. Obese children get a feeling of loneliness rather often, and this depression usually results in eating fattening foods and sitting by themselves.
- One of the causes for child obesity is their sleeping pattern. According to HealthDay, "A yawning child is more likely to be an overweight child." Less sleep disturbs normal metabolism and even a few nights of shortened sleep could have a dramatic impact. Lack of sleep causes fatigue, which most likely will reduce the amount of physical activity per day. This will not allow children to be burning the calories they should be. A disturbed normal metabolism can contribute to, along with obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and insulin resistance. Many doctors, adult and pediatricians, encourage a sufficient amount of sleep per night.
- "Keith Ayoob, a registered dietician at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York says he never meets children who have better eating habits than their parents." Says USA Today. Obese parents result in obese children. Children's parents are the most common and identifiable factor for child obesity. Some parents don't realize that their children's obesity problems have serious effects on their emotional, along with physical, health. Some parents think that the phase will pass and their children will eventually lose the weight. What they don't realize is that being obese as a child could emotionally devastate them for the rest

of their lives. One cause for families having obesity problems is lack of time. Parents are extremely busy and kids have crazy schedules as well, so there is not always enough time to prepare a healthy meal. That is why fast food, vending machine food, gas station food, etc. have become a part of their daily lives, which is not good at all. It is extremely important that parents model good health decisions in front of their children because they will most likely follow in their footsteps. If parents made the food stock in the house healthier, the children will get used to the idea and begin to eat better outside of the home as well. However, it is not always easy for parents to realize the problem and take action.

- A major reason for obesity in children is because of the lack of exercise, but it is also what they are doing when they're not being active. In modern times, children tend to spend hours in front of the television, playing on the computer, and playing video games. This mentally exhausts children and makes them tired so they don't want to engage in any healthy activities. It is said that children watch more than a full day's (24 hours) worth of television in the course of one week. This does not even include the time on the computer or with video games. Children in the past engaged in much more physical activity than children now. Due to the technological advances children are becoming lazier, unhealthier, and more obese than children 30 years ago. Many professionals agree that this problem needs to be taken care of right away.
- Some solutions to facing this problem just at home are rather simple to say, but more difficult to do. At some point each week parents should prepare a list for the grocery store and try to pick out the healthiest items that will still taste good to kids and themselves. By reducing the amount fatty foods in the house over a period of time, it will gradually set in and become accepted with the child. Parents should try to get their children to engage in as much physical activity as possible. Maybe the child could join a soccer team, basketball team, tennis team, etc, or even participate in dance classes. If children do not want to participate in activities with other peers, the parents should set aside some special time to take a walk, run, bike ride, etc. for them and their children. In order to convince the child to engage in physical activities their amount of TV, computer, and video game time must be cut down. The parents should give them a restricted amount of time for this and stick to it rather strictly. Just these few suggestions could change a child's life significantly, both emotionally and physically.

Statement of the Problem:

- One of the goals for Healthy People 2010 is to reduce the amount of overweight children ages 6-19 years old. "While overweight among children and adolescents was relatively stable from the 1960's to 1980, overweight in youths as increased since 1980" (NCHS 2006).

- “From 1963-1970 to 1999-2002, the prevalence of overweight among children ages 6-11 years quadrupled, from approximately 4 percent to 16 percent” (NCHS 2006).
- “During the same time period, the prevalence among adolescents aged 12-19 years increased more than three-fold from approximately 5 percent to 16 percent” (NCHS 2006).
- According to the American Heart Association, overweight children are likely to become overweight adults, and treating this issue at a young age may reduce the risk of obesity in later years of life. Also, by reducing the amount of obese children now, will reduce the amount of people diagnosed with diabetes, heart disease and other health issues. The AHA also states that just because a child weighs a lot does not mean they are overweight. When dealing with body composition and body weight, it is important to consider what is healthy for a certain body type. For example, the healthy weight differs for a child that is 4 feet 2 inches tall and a child that is 5 feet 3 inches tall. A good way to determine if a child is overweight is to measure their Body Mass Index (BMI). By measuring the BMI, it gives the amount of just fat in the body rather than the total weight.
- “Reaching and maintaining an appropriate body weight is important. That’s why recommendations that focus on small but permanent changes in eating may work better than a series of short-term changes that can’t be sustained” (AHA 2006). When dealing with children, it is important to remember that a parent or doctor cannot just change a child’s life in a matter of days. It takes time because children are more fragile than adults and by increasing the amount of nutrition gradually over a long period of time will get them used to the idea and eventually, hopefully, accept it. It is important to give children all the nutrients the body needs, so cutting out foods immediately they eat everyday will not have a good effect on the child.
- According to the AHA, it is important for the entire family to partake in eating better to help influence the child. It takes the support of a family to go through with something this difficult.
- “In treating most children overweight, the main emphasis should be to prevent weight gain above what’s appropriate for expected increases in height. This is called prevention of increased weight gain velocity. For many children this may mean limited or no weight gain while they grow taller. Recommendations for maintaining weight should include regular, physical activity and careful attention to diet to avoid too many calories” (AHA 2006).

Epidemiological Picture:

- According the AHA and their Jump Rope for Heart program, one in every three American children is obese.
- “An obese 13-year-old has a 75 percent chance of becoming an obese adult” (AHA 2006).
- “Fifty percent of today’s youth do not engage in any regular physical activity” (AHA 2006).
- “Based on the data from the 1999-2000 NHANES, the prevalence of overweight in children ages 6-11 increased from 4.2 percent to 15.3 percent compared with data from 1963-65. The prevalence of overweight in adolescents ages 12-19 increased from 4.6 percent to 15.5 percent” (AHA 2006).
- Among American children ages 6-11, the following are overweight, using the 95th percentile or higher of body mass index (BMI) values on the CDC 2000 growth chart (AHA 2006, CDC 2000):
 - For whites (only), 13.0 percent of boys and 12.0 percent of girls.
 - For blacks of African Americans (only), 17.6 percent of boys and 22.1 percent of girls.
 - For Mexican Americans, 27.3 percent of boys and 19.6 percent of girls.
- Among adolescents ages 12-19, the following are overweight, using the 95th percentile or higher of BMI values on the CDC 2000 growth chart (AHA 2006, CDC 2000):
 - For whites (only), 13.0 percent of boys and 12.2 percent of girls.
 - For blacks or African Americans (only), 20.5 percent of boys and 25.7 percent of girls.
 - For Mexican Americans, 27.5 percent of boys and 19.4 percent girls.
- According to an article in USA Today, about 25 million kids (one-third) and two thirds of adults are overweight, or on the way to becoming overweight. They are all at an increased risk of developing diabetes, high cholesterol and other health problems (USA Today, 2006).
- “Children say they depend on their parents for the ABCs of good health: 71% say they get information about how to be healthy from their mothers, according to a survey of 1,487 children, ages 8 to 18, conducted for the America on the Move Foundation. And Dad is the resource for 43% of the children” (USA Today, 2006)
- It is quite obvious that children now-a-days are much more obese than children 40 years ago. Most of this is due to lack of physical activity because of technological advances. It is also due to convenience of fast food that is not good for you at all.

It is tempting to eat fast food because it is very quick and very cheap and people's lives now-a-days are very busy and on the go.

Solutions to the Problem:

- A recent article in **USA Today** entitled *Danger Signs of Child Obesity* is addressing the problem through what kinds of food kids are eating. Dr. Todd, a profound doctor who works with overweight kids in St. Louis, says that the first major problem has to do with the beverages that children are drinking. Children don't usually drink enough milk, which results in calcium deficiency. When children are around age two it is important to switch them from whole milk to skim milk to reduce the risk of unhealthy weight gain, and a lot of kids are not switched. Most children are drinking way too many sugary drinks, such as soda, and just by those beverages they are taking in 500 calories or more per day. Todd says, "Just by cutting those out, they can lose a pound a week." Other problems are too much sitting around and not eating enough fruits vegetables, and other nutritious foods. Most children are ingesting a lot of packaged and fast foods, and having structured meals. Doctors and health advisors realize that it is not always convenient to go to the grocery store all the time to buy foods to cook but there are a few suggested solutions such as packaged salads, cut up vegetables and fruit, roasted chicken, and ready to eat fish and meat. This article included a meal plan and some ideas as to what to feed children. Some items include:
 - Half a whole-grain mini bagel spread with 1 tablespoon of peanut butter, almond butter or soy nut butter and 4 ounces milk.
 - Half a slice of leftover pizza and 4 ounces 100% calcium added orange juice.
 - 4 ounces low-fat fruit yogurt and half a slice of whole grain toast.
 - Fruit and yogurt smoothie made with 4 ounces plain, low-fat yogurt and half a banana or one-half cup berries
 - One chopped hard-cooked egg and four medium whole grain crackers.
 - Waffle sandwich: 1 whole-grain tasted waffle spread with almond, peanut or soy butters, folded in half and cut up; 4 ounces of milk.
 - 2 tablespoons hummus or peanut butter and four whole-grain crackers.
 - Small bowl whole-grain cereal (one-half cup) and one-half cup low-fat milk.
 - Cut-up cooked veggies (one-fourth cup) and 2 tablespoons low-fat dip.
 - One-fourth up low-fat cottage cheese and four whole grain crackers.(USA Today article retrieved through Academic Search Premiere Database, 2006)

- The **American Heart Association** concentrates not only on food intake, but also on exercise. They state that, "Reducing caloric intake is the easiest change. Highly restrictive diets that forbid favorite foods are likely to fail." The only exception in creating children's diets that forbid favorite foods are when a child is in critical condition due to their weight and must lose the pounds immediately. Becoming more active is always recommended when trying to lose weight. Just by increasing exercise alone will most of the time shed a few pounds and overall

make a child healthier. Parents have the biggest influence in a child's diet. When parents model good eating habits, children are likely to follow. When children are not that overweight but could still afford to lose a few pounds, it is suggested that they maintain a stable weight as they grow taller, which will eventually thin them out and make them healthier. Factors predicting success are:

- Frequent intervention skills
- Including parents in the dietary treatment program
- Strong social support of dietary intervention from others involved in preparing food
- Regular exercise prescription including social support

The American Heart Association and the National Football League (NFL) have teamed up to try to influence kids to be healthier mostly through activity. Now, middle school teachers across the country are joining the contest "For a Teacher, By a Teacher" to try and help the kids in their classes to become more active. The top thirty suggestions of ideas by teachers that involve activity for their students will win recognition and a prize of \$250. Some ideas about how teachers can help are:

- Taking heart rates pre- and post-exercise for science class.
- Calculating distances walked for math classes.
- Conducting plays that require physical activity for language arts or social studies classes.
- Developing physical activity games that incorporate learning (such as anatomy tag for science classes).

This is an excellent program that will hopefully help young children in America become and more active and lead healthier lives.

- An article entitled *Childhood Obesity-The Modern Health Dilemma* by Steve Hall addresses the problem in a mental health type of way. Steve Hall is the owner of www.your-official-guide.com where there are lists of subjects that have educational information about them. Steve Hall says that if children are obese they have a less likely chance in developing a social life. Kids who are obese tend to be self-conscious and do not usually want to engage in conversation or activity with their peers. He says that some parents overlook the problem and don't usually realize how devastating it can be for a child to be overweight. Children are brutal sometimes and really emotionally devastate others by making fun of them, especially obese children. A few pointers for parents that Steve Hall provided are:
 - Encourage your child to take part in sports or dance. If they're self conscious about that, parents could set aside some time and exercise with them in private.
 - Definitely limit amount of TV time because it is extremely unproductive. If children spend less time in front of the TV, they may spend more time exercising.

- Cut back on junk food in the home and eventually get rid of it all. Children will eventually get used to this, and if they see parents eating better, it is more likely to work.

Additional Internet Resources:

Weight-to-length Ratio at Birth Predicts Obesity. (2006). *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*. Retrieved November 2, 2006, from Medline Plus.com. Copyrighted by Reuters Health, 2006.
http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/news/fullstory_40660.html

Sleepless Children at Higher Obesity Risk. (2006). *HealthDay*. Retrieved November 2, 2006, from Medline Plus.com. Copyrighted by ScoutNews LLC, 2006. http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/news/fullstory_40276.html.

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November 2, 2006, from Medline Plus.com. Copyrighted by ScoutNews LLC, 2006. http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/news/fullstory_40276.html.

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