

# Childhood Obesity: A “BIG” Problem

By Michelle Olsen, RD, LD

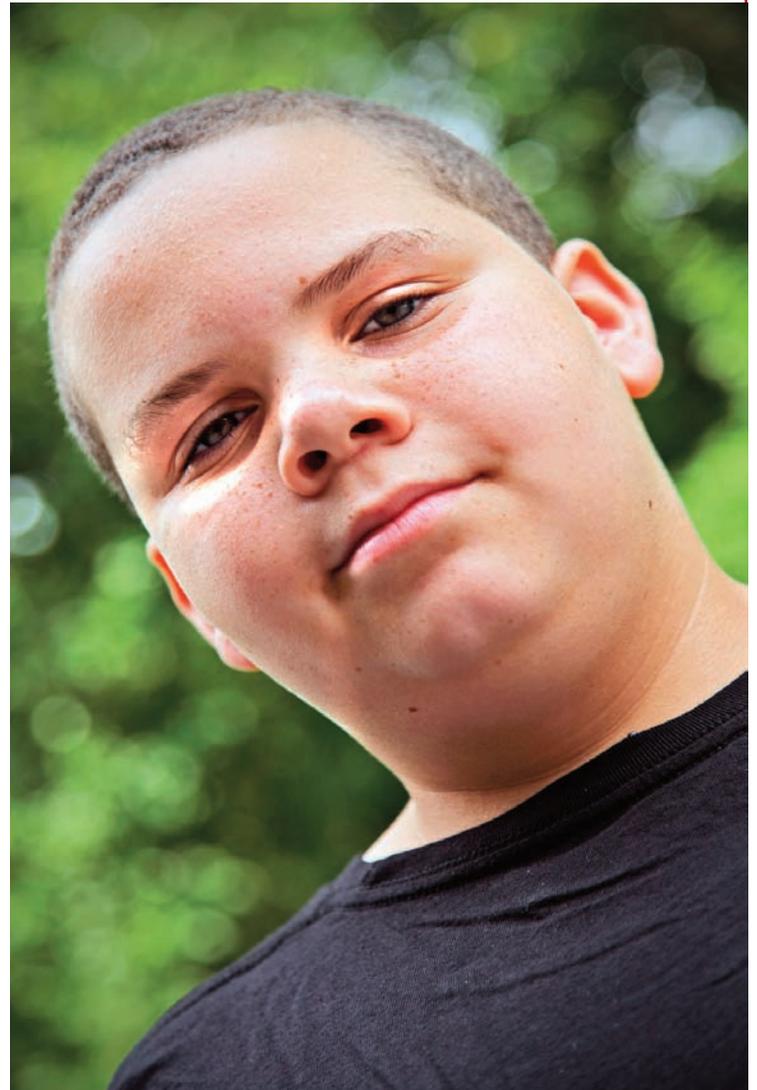
**O**besity in children is on the rise. How can parents, teachers, coaches, health professionals, or any other adult help to prevent or manage obesity in children?

First, we need to identify if it really is a problem. Often parents are not on the same page when it comes to realizing that their child is overweight. One parent may not “see” what the other does, or is in denial that it truly is a problem. Before causing unnecessary stress, it is a good idea to set up an appointment with your child’s pediatrician, and for both parents to attend this appointment.

Determining whether a child is obese or overweight is based on the child’s height, weight and body mass index (BMI) which are plotted on a growth chart. If a BMI is at or above the 85% and lower than the 95%, the child is determined to be overweight. If the BMI is at or above the 95%, obesity is defined. Either way, action needs to be taken to either prevent further weight gain or to safely lose weight.

It is important that the whole family takes on a healthy eating approach. The key is to stress healthy eating not “dieting.” Initiate the 5-2-1-0 guidelines: 5 servings of fruits and vegetables daily, no more than 2 hours of “screen” time per day, 1 hour of physical activity daily, 7 days/week, and 0 servings of sugar sweetened beverages, such as: soda, Gatorade, lemonade, fruit punch, and iced tea. Encourage your child to be physically active! If they are not interested in a specific sport, talk about other options such as: jumping rope, swimming, going for a walk, dancing in the living room, or sledding. The key is to be active EVERYDAY! Set up a reward system with your child, using a chart to keep track of their activity, but do not reward with food!

Limit the amount of processed, refined carbohydrates and high calorie foods that are in your home. Example of



these foods: ice cream, crackers, cookies, bakery items, muffins, donuts, Poptarts, cereal bars, chewy granola bars, instant macaroni and cheese, Ramen noodles, and sweetened cereals. These foods are usually the first thing kids will go for when they are hungry and they will eat way more than the one serving that is labeled. Remember, if it is available, they will want to eat it. Help them to avoid the temptation by not having it on hand.

Instead, stock your kitchen with healthy, ready to eat foods. For example: cut up carrots, fruit, low fat cheese,

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whole grain granola bars and crackers, yogurt, pretzels, trail mix and frozen desserts that are individually packaged are all healthy alternatives. Keep ingredients to make a smoothie such as frozen fruit and yogurt (see smoothie recipe below) on hand. Add fruit to their morning cereal and provide a salad before dinner using ready-to-eat lettuce with shredded carrots. Be sure to replace soda with water or low-fat milk. Encourage your child to eat slowly and listen to their bodies by eating only when they are hungry. Teach them to ask themselves, "Am I really hungry?" This will help them be more aware of when they should be eating as opposed to freely eating because they are bored or upset.

Eat meals at home and not at restaurants! Limit the amount of times you go out to eat. The more you go out the more likely your child will overeat. Avoid fast food and any fried foods! These will lead to weight gain!

Managing weight for obese or overweight children is a daily effort. It will not go away overnight but will improve if all adults taking care of the child are on board and ready to make changes themselves. It's about choices and taking the time to provide healthy options, whether it is the choice of making dinner tonight instead of going through the drive thru or what activity you may need to drive your child to in an effort to reach the one hour of physical activity for that day.

Ongoing support and encouragement is also very important. Meeting regularly with a registered dietitian is key to success. Elliot Hospital has several dietitians that specialize in child nutrition. For an appointment or more information, call 663-3130.



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## Banana Smoothie

### Ingredients:

1 cup skim milk	1/8 teaspoon ground nutmeg
1 banana	1 tablespoon fat-free whipped cream
1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon	

### Directions:

Place milk, banana and spices in a blender and blend on high speed until smooth. Top with whipped cream and enjoy!  
Makes 2 servings.

### Nutrition information per serving:

Calories: 94, Total Fat: 0g, Saturated Fat: 0g, Trans Fat: 0g, Cholesterol: 3mg, Sodium: 52mg, Carbohydrates: 19g, Dietary Fiber: 1.5g, Sugars: 13g, Protein: 5g, Vitamin A: 287iu (5%), Vitamin C: 5.1mg (8%), Calcium: 155mg (15%), Iron: 0.2mg (1%)

Diabetic Exchanges: Fruit: 1.0, Milk: 0.5

Total Preparation: 5 Minutes

