

It's an Epidemic

Nancy Husarik, MD

Childhood obesity in America is increasing at an alarming rate. According to some reports, rates of obesity in kids from 6-19 years of age, may be approaching 25%. Levels have tripled over the last three decades. Obesity is defined by body mass index (BMI). While not perfect, it is an easy way to take into account height and weight and is a reasonable correlate to body fat. You can easily calculate BMI with online calculators, or you can ask your child's pediatrician for their BMI. You can calculate it yourself: $BMI = (\text{weight in pounds} / (\text{height in inches})^2) \times 703$. Kids with BMI over the 95th percentile for their gender and age, are considered obese, and kids with a BMI between 85th and 95th percentile are considered, overweight and at risk for obesity.

Here in New Hampshire, over 30% of kids 6-12 are overweight or obese (BMI greater than or equal to 85th percentile). Today's generation of kids are less likely to outlive their parents compared to prior generations. Over 75% of kids who are overweight as teens, will remain overweight as adults. This puts them at high risk for a variety of diseases including heart disease, diabetes, bone and joint problems, sleep apnea, and depression. Even more alarming, if the current trend continues, 50% of children born after 2000, are likely to develop diabetes.

While there is a lot of debate over what is causing the current obesity epidemic, the bottom line is that overweight results from taking in more calories than are used, on a regular basis. In this society, it is easy to take in large amounts of calories that provide minimal nutrition. Think of that 20 oz soda which can have over 300 calories. Half of vegetable calories consumed by children are in the form of French fries. Over one-third of today's children do not participate in any regular fitness activity.

If you or anyone in your family has a BMI in the obese range, it is time to act. Children who are obese tend to suffer

psychologically, underperform on school testing, and miss more days of school due to illness. Costs of obesity continue to escalate for individuals, as well as for the nation.

Discuss your concerns with your healthcare provider. Check with your insurance carrier to see if nutrition counseling is available. Get active. Many resources are available to assist with getting involved

in physical activity. You can access online sites promoting activities, healthcare offices, workplaces, community athletic organizations, libraries, fitness venues and sporting good stores.

Recommendations:

- Try to work up to 40 minutes of vigorous activity most days of the week.
- Limit portions to single servings of nutrient rich foods.
- Eliminate soda and avoid fast food as much as possible.
- Limit 'screen time' to less than 2 hours most days. Get out with your kids.
- Use more calories than you take in.
- Obesity is a huge concern, but there is hope. Making even a small change will result in improvement over time. Taking in 100 few calories a day can result in a 10 lb weight loss in less than a year. Find physical activities you enjoy, as you will be more likely to stick with them. Today is the day to get started.



Dr. Husarik received her medical degree from the University of Nebraska College of Medicine in Omaha, NE. She is Board certified in Pediatrics and Internal Medicine. She can be reached at Elliot Pediatrics and Primary Care at Raymond., Raymond Shopping Center, 15 Freetown Road, Raymond, 895-8000.

The Elliot.
Live Better!