Childhood Obesity

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Childhood obesity has become a disturbing national epidemic and has grown considerably . Ironically, obesity is among the easiest medical conditions to recognize but most difficult to treat. Overweight children are much more likely to become overweight adults unless they adopt and maintain healthier patterns of eating and exercise.

Now when is my child Obese?

Obesity is defined as an excessively high amount of body fat in relation to lean body mass. Overweight refers to increased body weight in relation to height, when compared to some standard of acceptable or desirable weight. To determine if your child is obese we plot your child's weight, height and weight-for-height on a growth chart. If the weight-for-age and weight-for-height is over the 85th – 90th percentile the child is then to heavy for his/her age and height.

Why is my child Obese?

Lack of physical activity, nutrition, genetics and family factors all contribute to obesity in children and adolescents. If one parent is obese, there is a 50 percent chance that a child will also be obese. However, when both parents are obese, a child has an 80 percent chance of being obese. The reason for this is genetics, but more so the eating habits developed during childhood. Habits like unhealthy cooking methods used to prepare food, like using a lot of oil for frying, also the habit of not having acceptable portions. Although the genetic influences are significant, it is important to recognize that poor eating habits and overeating, lack of exercise, and family eating patterns and pressures also contribute to the inability to maintain a healthy weight.

What are the Health Effects?

Overweight children, as compared to children with a healthy weight, are more likely to develop many health problems such as high cholesterol and high blood pressure, which are associated with heart disease in adults. Type 2 diabetes, previously considered an adult disease, has increased dramatically in overweight children and adolescents. Children at a healthy weight are free of these weight-related diseases and less at risk of developing these diseases in adulthood. Other than the chronic health problems that is associated with obesity, there are also a mental effect on the child which can be heart breaking to experience. Problems like social discrimination and low-self-esteem is commonly experienced obese children.

What can I do if my child is obese?

Your child should definitely be seen by a paediatrician for a thorough medical evaluation to consider the possibility of a physical cause. In the absence of a physical disorder, the only way to lose weight is to reduce the number of kilojoules being eaten and to increase the child's physical activity. Keep fatty and sugary snacks to a minimum and keep fruits, vegetables and low-fat snacks available. It can be beneficial to see a dietician to identify problem areas is the diet and to give practical tips and guidelines to change the child's lifestyle. Increase physical activity, perhaps by taking a few brisk walks with your child each week. This can also be a good time to communicate with your child, sometimes we tend to forget communication, especially in fast paced lifestyles. Let your child know he or she is loved and appreciated whatever his or her weight. An overweight child probably knows better than anyone else that he or she has a weight problem. Overweight children need support, acceptance, and encouragement from their parents.

Be a good role model for your child. If your child sees you enjoying healthy foods and physical activity, he or she is more likely to do the same now and rest of his or her life.

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