Overweight Children

By Amber Williams

Although obesity is not a new issue for adults, research has shown it is also a problem for children and adolescents that in the past has often been overlooked. The effects of being an overweight child are both physical and psychological, both short-term and long-term. The increasing numbers of overweight children has become a national public health concern. How can society change the way our children are developing unhealthy habits? One key to childhood obesity lies in parents’ hands. As a parent it is important to be aware of the effects of childhood obesity as well as how to prevent or, if need be, treat childhood obesity.

Effects of Childhood Obesity

Being an obese child affects both mental and physical well-being. Psychological effects of being an obese child are more short-term whereas the physical effects are long-term. One major effect of being overweight as a child is the social consequence of feeling left out and isolated from other children. The social intolerance from other children causes low levels of self-esteem and symptoms of depression. The physical effects of being overweight as a child include a higher risk of Type 2 diabetes which usually arises in adulthood but is now affecting children and adolescents, high blood pressure and high cholesterol which are risk factors for developing heart disease, and finally the risk for being an obese adult which includes more complicated health risks.

Causes of Obesity in Children

The problem of obesity arises from inactive lifestyles, unhealthy eating habits, and genetic predisposition for having weight problems. All of these factors play a part in
most cases of childhood obesity. Children whose parents are overweight or struggle with
their weight influence their children’s weight through genetics and also through
modeling. Children are very easily influenced and tend to watch and mimic lifestyle
patterns of their parents. In early childhood a child learns from watching and observing,
and as s/he matures their eating habits as well as physical exercise routines are reinforced
by their parents. Thus the parents play a crucial role in the development and support of
their children’s lifestyles.

**Prevention and Treatment of Childhood Obesity**

Controllable factors of childhood obesity include physical activity level and
healthy eating habits. From a very young age a parent should already attempt to instill
healthy eating habits and promote physical activity. Showing children healthy eating
habits by having a balanced diet and active lifestyle yourself are very important when
trying to develop children’s own healthy routines. Examples of healthy eating habits for
the family include not having junk food available for snacks and encouraging fruit or
vegetables as munchies for in-between meals. Another way to promote a healthy lifestyle
in your child is to encourage physical activity and discourage sitting in front of the
television, playing video games, or on the computer for extensive amounts of time.
Positive ways of encouraging physical exercise include family outings that involve
physical activity, participation in children’s community sports, or simply safe outdoor
play.

If your child already appears to have a problem with weight, all hope is not lost.
There are many ways to deal with a child’s troublesome weight. Above anything else, if
your child has an issue with weight it is important not to ridicule or pass judgment
because s/he is well aware of his/her weight and feels the psychological effects from
peers. The immediate goal with a child who has a weight problem is not to lose the
weight but to try and stagnate gaining more weight and to instil healthier habits of eating
and physical activity. If the child begins to maintain a level of weight, in most cases s/he
will probably grow into the weight. Encourage a healthier lifestyle by instilling the
above activities and eating habits. For more information on dealing with childhood
obesity visit

http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/topics/obesity/calltoaction/fact_adolescents.htm or visit
your family physician.

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