

Overweight

Over the last several decades, we have seen an unprecedented rise in childhood obesity. 15% of American children are obese, a threefold increase from the 1970's. Our changing lifestyles have had a significant impact on children's weight. Excessive media consumption and screen time has led to relatively sedentary children. Changes in food consumption with an increase in sugary drinks, fast foods and eating out as well as proficient marketing of calorie dense foods have all led to a marked increase in caloric intake. Together, these changes in calorie consumption and inactivity have contributed to the childhood obesity epidemic.

Complications due to obesity, previously only rarely seen in children, are predictably on the rise as well. Diseases such as type 2 diabetes mellitus, cardiovascular disease, hypertension, breathing problems, and gallbladder disease, just to name a few, are no longer seen primarily in adults. Due to the complications of obesity, this generation of children may be the first to live few years than their parents. Often, parents feel overwhelmed by the task of weight control. It means taking a serious and critical view of our own eating habits and activity. For many, just trying to fit healthy meals and activity into an already busy schedule is a daunting task. Many children are cared for by several caregivers (grandparents, after-school, etc.) making lifestyle modification all the more difficult.

Despite the obstacles, your child needs your help and encouragement. Ignoring the problem of overweight and obesity does not make it go away and increases the odds of complications due to progressive weight gain. Goals for most children should focus on weight maintenance, activity and healthy eating rather than diets. Please talk to your doctor about options for weight control if your child is overweight.

Recently, First Lady Michelle Obama has promoted the Let's Move! initiative. This program, along with many federal, state and local programs have aimed to address the causes of obesity in children. There are many good web resources for parents and children interested in gaining control over weight gain. These are located in our "Resources" section.

A good rule of thumb from the Maine Youth Overweight Collaborative is:

- 5-2-1-0
- 5 or more fruits or vegetables per day.
- 2 hours or less of screen time per day.
- 1 hour or more of physical activity per day.
- 0 sugar drinks with more water and low fat milk.



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