



## THE FACTS ABOUT CHILDHOOD OBESITY

### **Obesity is the fastest-growing health threat in America today**

According to the American Obesity Association (AOA), 15.5 percent of adolescents (ages 12 to 19) and 15.3 percent of children (ages 6 to 11) are obese. These numbers have more than tripled in the past 20 years.

### **Today's generation is at risk for dying young**

According to Dr. David Satcher, former U.S. surgeon general, "This is the first generation of children whose life expectancies will be less than that of their parents. We have no record of this happening before in the entire history of human kind."

### **You Can Advocate for Health**

Parents, children and teens all over the country are banding together to influence healthy changes in school lunch programs, vending machine snacks/drinks, physical education programs and more. In addition to learning the facts about obesity and weight, adults can encourage children to *take action*. Youth advocates have the power to influence their peers and family members, as well as policymakers, educators, community leaders and more. Search the Internet for youth advocacy programs in your community. Places to start include:

- ParentsAction – [www.stiritupamerica.org](http://www.stiritupamerica.org)
- VERB – <http://www.cdc.gov/youthcampaign/>
- TASC – The After School Corporation – [www.tascorp.org](http://www.tascorp.org)
- American Obesity Association – [www.obesity.org/subs/advocacy/](http://www.obesity.org/subs/advocacy/)

**Research, education and understanding** are critical to reducing childhood obesity:

- Approximately 30 percent of children ages 6 to 11 are overweight; more than 15 percent of this age group is classified as obese. *This number has tripled in the last 20 years.*
- Overweight children and adolescents is generally caused by a lack of physical activity, unhealthy eating patterns or a combination of the two. Genetics also play an important role in determining a child's weight.
- Overweight *adolescents* have a 70 percent chance of becoming overweight or obese *adults*. This increases to 80 percent if one or more parent is overweight or obese.
- Children who are overweight are teased and discriminated against by peers. This often leads to low self-esteem and depression.
- Overweight and obesity are associated with heart disease, certain types of cancer, diabetes, stroke, arthritis, breathing problems, psychological disorders such as depression, and increased risk of death.
- Gaining 11 to 18 pounds doubles a person's risk of developing type 2 diabetes compared to people who have not gained weight.
- Losing just 10 percent of your body weight can improve your health.
- The economic cost of obesity in the United States was \$117 billion in 2000.
- Each year, 300,000 deaths in the United States are associated with obesity.

## Get Physical

- Children should be physically active each day for at least 60 minutes. This can include walking, riding a scooter, rollerblading, swimming, biking, playing hopscotch and simply playing outside. Don't forget physical education in schools, too!
- Being physically active (expending energy) is the only way to balance the number of calories a child eats.
  - To maintain weight, the intake of calories must equal the output of energy (physical activity/calories burned).
  - To lose weight, a person must use more energy than he/she takes in.
- Experts recommend that children limit television viewing and computer/video game usage to less than two hours a day. (Research shows 43 percent of adolescents watch more than two hours of television a day.)

## Food For Thought

- Today, restaurants serve portion sizes that are double the size they were 20 years ago. That's why many of us – children included – don't realize how much food we are being served. **It's called "portion distortion."**
  - Help your child eat sensible portion sizes. Try ordering one meal and splitting it, or choose healthy appetizers or side dishes instead of a meal.
- Follow the Dietary Guidelines for Americans ([www.health.gov/dietaryguidelines](http://www.health.gov/dietaryguidelines)).
- Drink water and low-fat milk. One 12-ounce soft drink or fruit juice equals 150 calories.
- Think of food in terms of calories and energy. One small chocolate chip cookie (approximately 50 calories) equals walking briskly for 10 minutes. One jelly doughnut equals one hour of walking. One fast-food meal of a hamburger, fries and soft drink (1,200 calories) equals approximately *two hours* of running.
- Help your child make smart choices from every good group (see [www.mypyramid.com](http://www.mypyramid.com)).
  - Include five servings of fruits and vegetables a day.
  - Make half your grains whole grains. Try whole grain pasta, breads or pancake mix instead of refined products such as white bread or white rice.
  - Drink milk with every meal. Eat low-fat or fat-free calcium-rich foods for snacks (cheese, milk, yogurt). Choose lactose-free alternatives – widely available in grocery stores – if you cannot tolerate dairy products. These products also come in low-fat and fat-free varieties.
  - Choose lean protein (90-percent lean ground meat, skinless chicken, pork loin and round steaks and roasts.). Choose lean turkey or ham, tuna or low-fat sandwich meats instead of regular-varieties of ham, bologna and salami.

## Resources

[www.kidshealth.org](http://www.kidshealth.org)

[www.kidnetic.com](http://www.kidnetic.com)

We Can! – [www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/obesity/wecan/](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/obesity/wecan/)

WIN – Weight-control Information Network, part of the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases – [http://win.niddk.nih.gov/publications/over\\_child.htm](http://win.niddk.nih.gov/publications/over_child.htm)