

Tipsheet: Childhood Obesity / Overweight

Childhood obesity is usually caused by unhealthy eating habits, exercising too little, or both. Genetics and lifestyle also play a role.

- 13 percent of Minnesota children under 5 years are overweight.
- 15 percent to 22 percent of all Minnesota adolescents are obese.
- On average, children spend 5.5 hours a day watching TV, using the Internet and playing video games. Every additional hour of screen time increases a child's risk of being overweight by 2 percent.
- Almost 60 percent of children (ages 9-13) don't participate in any type of physical activity program outside of school.
- 61 percent of overweight 5-10-year-olds already have at least one risk factor for heart disease; 26 percent have two or more risk factors.
- The most immediate consequence of being overweight as perceived by the children themselves is social discrimination. This is associated with poor self-esteem and depression.

Creating a Healthier Home Environment

Get the whole family involved.

Children can't change their exercise and eating habits by themselves—they need the help and support of their families and other caregivers. Small, progressive steps can help.

Do:

- Be a good role model for your child. Exercise and practice good eating habits yourself.
- Buy active toys: bikes, push toys, jump ropes, climbing structures, balls, etc.
- Include children in active chores like washing the car or walking the dog.
- Limit TV / computer / video game time.
- Offer more whole-grain food with meals and snacks.
- Reduce the number of meals from fast-food and other restaurants. Limit to no more than once a week.
- Remove sugar-sweetened drinks from the home.
- Remove TVs and computers from children's bedrooms.
- Reward successful changes. Make family goals (like walking together three times a week). Then celebrate your success. Rewards should be consistent with the goal and be given regularly, on a daily or weekly basis.
- Sit down for family meals and have the meal last at least 30 minutes.
- Stay active together. Plan physical activities for the whole family.
- Stock up on healthy snacks:
 - Bowls of finger foods like grapes and berries
 - Cut-up vegetables such as cucumbers, carrots, sweet bell peppers and crunchy jicama
 - Easy-to-grab yogurt
 - Healthy dips for veggies
 - Fresh fruit (like melons): cut into bite-sized pieces and keep at kids' eye level in the frig.
- Teach your child good eating and exercise habits now to help him or her have a healthy life.

Don't:

- Make your child eat when he or she isn't hungry.
- Offer dessert as a reward for finishing a meal. Doing this teaches your child to value sweets more than other food.
- Use food to comfort or reward or to punish.

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Is Your Child Overweight or Obese?

- Doctors and other healthcare professionals are the best people to determine whether your child or adolescent's weight is healthy. They can also rule out rare medical problems as the cause of unhealthy weight.
- A Body Mass Index (BMI) number can be calculated from measurements of height and weight. Because the amount of body fat changes with age and differs between boys and girls, age- and sex-specific percentiles are used for children and teens (and not for adults).
- Find out more. Go to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's [Body Mass Index Calculator](#) for children.

Sources: Mayo Clinic, Minnesota Medical Association, American Academy of Family Physicians, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, YMCA Minneapolis