



Diabetes

Diabetes Home

Prevent Type 2 Diabetes in Kids

There's a growing type 2 diabetes problem in our young people. But parents can help turn the tide with healthy changes that are good for the whole family.

Until recently, young children and teens almost never got type 2 diabetes, which is why it used to be called adult-onset diabetes. Now, about one-third of American youth are overweight, a problem closely related to the increase in kids with type 2 diabetes, some as young as 10 years old.

Weight Matters

People who are overweight—especially if they have excess belly fat—are more likely to have insulin resistance, kids included. Insulin resistance is a major risk factor for type 2 diabetes.

Insulin is a hormone made by the pancreas that acts like a key to let blood sugar into cells for use as energy. Because of heredity (traits inherited from family members) or lifestyle (eating too much and moving too little), cells can stop responding normally to insulin. That causes the pancreas to make more insulin to try to get cells to respond and take in blood sugar.

As long as enough insulin is produced, blood sugar levels remain normal. This can go on for several years, but eventually the pancreas can't keep up. Blood sugar starts to rise, first after meals and then all the time. Now the stage is set for type 2 diabetes.

Insulin resistance usually doesn't have any symptoms, though some kids develop patches of thickened, dark, velvety skin called acanthosis nigricans, usually in body creases and folds such as the back of the neck or armpits. They may also have other conditions related to insulin resistance, including:

- High blood pressure
- High cholesterol
- Polycystic ovary syndrome

Activity Matters

Being physically active lowers the risk for type 2 diabetes because it helps the body use insulin better, decreasing insulin resistance. Physical activity improves health in lots of other ways, too, from controlling blood pressure to boosting mental health.

Age Matters

Kids who get type 2 diabetes are usually diagnosed in their early teens. One reason is that hormones present during puberty make it harder for the body use insulin, especially for girls, who are more likely than boys to develop type 2 diabetes. That's an important reason to help your kids take charge of their health while they're young.

More Risk Factors

These factors also increase kids' risk for type 2 diabetes:

- Having a family member with type 2 diabetes.
- Being born to a mom with gestational diabetes (diabetes while pregnant).
- Being African American, Hispanic/Latino, Native American/Alaska Native, Asian American, or Pacific Islander.
- Having one or more conditions related to insulin resistance.

If your child is overweight and has any two of the risk factors listed above, talk to your doctor about getting his or her blood sugar tested. Testing typically begins at 10 years old or when puberty starts, whichever is first, and is repeated every 3 years.

Take Charge, Family Style

Parents can do a lot to help their kids prevent type 2 diabetes. Set a new normal as a family—healthy changes become habits more easily when everyone does them together. Here are some tips to get started:

Mealtime Makeover

- Drink more water and fewer sugary drinks.
- Eat more fruits and vegetables.
- Make favorite foods healthier.
- Get kids involved in making healthier meals.
- Eat slowly—it takes at least 20 minutes to start feeling full.
- Eat at the dinner table only, not in front of the TV or computer.
- Shop for food together.
- Shop on a full stomach so you're not tempted to buy unhealthy food.
- Teach your kids to read food labels to understand which foods are healthiest.
- Have meals together as a family as often as you can.
- Don't insist kids clean their plates.
- Don't put serving dishes on the table.
- Serve small portions; let kids ask for seconds.

Want to Limit Overeating? Limit TV Time

A recent study showed that when the amount of TV kids watched was limited, they lost weight—but not because they were more active when they weren't watching. The difference was snacking: kids ate more when they were watching TV than when doing other activities, even sedentary (not physically active) ones.



- Reward kids with praise instead of food.

Encourage your kids to reach for fruit, the original fast food.

Getting Physical


- Aim for your child to get 60 minutes of physical activity a day, in several 10- or 15-minute sessions or all at once.
- Start slow and build up.
- Keep it positive—focus on progress.
- Take parent and kid fitness classes together.
- Make physical activity more fun; try new things.
- Ask kids what activities they like best—everyone is different.
- Encourage kids to join a sports team.
- Have a “fit kit” available—a jump rope, hand weights, resistance bands.
- Limit screen time to 2 hours a day.
- Plan active outings, like hiking or biking.
- Take walks together.
- Move more in and out of the house—vacuuming, raking leaves, gardening.
- Turn chores into games, like racing to see how fast you can clean the house.


Young kids and teens are still growing, so if they're overweight the goal is to slow down weight gain while allowing normal growth and development. Don't put them on a weight loss diet without talking to their doctor.

More Information

Tips for Parents: Helping Kids Maintain a Healthy Weight

How Much Physical Activity Do Kids Need?

How to Avoid Portion Size Pitfalls  [PDF – 779 KB]

My Plate Kid's Place 

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