



# ACPeds Parent Talk

***Keeping parents up to date on the latest news in child and teen health***

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## Obesity Awareness Month Part 1: Definition, causes, and health effects



### What is it?

By [definition](#) (2), **obesity** means having **too much body fat**, or more than what is necessary for healthy development. Health professionals typically use [body mass index \(BMI\)](#) (3)--a measure of body fat based on height and weight--to determine whether or not a child is overweight or obese. As a general rule, **obesity is defined as a BMI at or above the 95th percentile** for children and teens of the same age and sex, according to the [Centers for Disease Control](#) (4).

### What causes it?

The causes of obesity range from the simple to the complicated. Often times, childhood obesity results from

- too much time spent sitting (and watching TV) (5) and not enough time being active,
- not getting enough sleep (6),
- a lack of community places to get adequate physical activity (7) like playgrounds, nature trails and parks
- easy access to inexpensive, high calorie snacks and beverages (8), and/or
- a lack of access to affordable, healthier foods (9).

However, other factors may play a role in setting one up for obesity such as

- genetics (10),
- influences from the media (11), like cartoons and advertisements,
- parenting practices like rewarding good behaviors with sweets and junk food (12), teasing, and fat shaming, or
- mental health issues (13) such as associating sweet and salty foods (i.e. comfort foods) with happiness and using food to cope with traumatic experiences such as sexual abuse (14).

### Implications for long-term health?

**OBESITY is linked to  
MORE CHRONIC CONDITIONS THAN:**



**SMOKING      POVERTY      DRINKING**

increasing the **RISK** of more than **20 PREVENTABLE CONDITIONS**, including *sleep apnea, asthma, heart disease, Type 2 diabetes, osteoarthritis, high blood pressure and high cholesterol stroke.*

(15)

In the United States and the UK, child obesity is considered a serious public health problem because of its **increasing prevalence and its long term effects on a child's health**. Obese children are not only more likely to be obese as adults, they are also at increased risk for diabetes, hypertension, certain cancers, bullying, low self-esteem, negative body image and depression.

### For more information

- A Different Perspective on the Obesity Epidemic (16) - ACPeds perspective piece
- The Impact of Media Use and Screen Time on Children, Adolescents, and Families (17) - ACPeds position statement

## Prevention and resources for parents

**Obesity is 100% preventable when parents and children work together daily to engage in healthful decision making.**

To foster a healthful lifestyle in your home, consider the following tips:



(18)

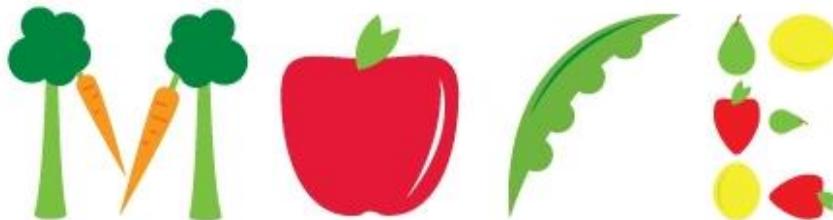
### Choose foods carefully

**Don't** buy cookies, candy, cakes, chips, ice cream or sugary cereals.

**Do** satisfy your family's sweet tooth with fresh fruits like bananas, cantaloupe, watermelon, apples, and oranges, perhaps served with Greek yogurt.

**Don't** serve hot dogs, bologna, bacon, sausages, and fried foods.

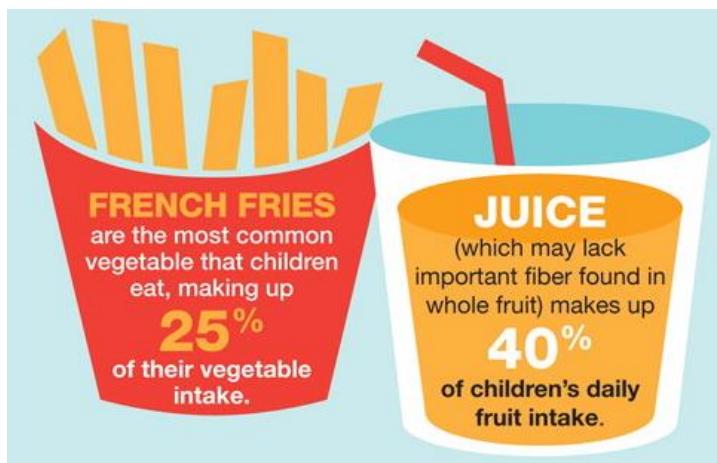
**Do** serve more chicken, turkey, fish and baked, broiled or boiled foods.



**Parents and kids should eat more fruits, veggies and whole grains.** (19)

Getting kids to eat vegetables is easier when they are served regularly and parents are seen eating the as well.

- For snack and with dinner, serve baby carrots, sweet peppers, broccoli, sweet potatoes, sweet peas, tomatoes and green beans.
- Instead of French fries, serve sweet potato fries or baked potato wedges.



(20)

Water is always healthier and usually cheaper than sugar-sweetened beverages.

- Whenever possible, serve your children water and sometimes non-fat milk instead of soda and juice. [Click here for estimates on how much water you should drink daily](#) (21).

### Increase physical activity

On average, children need about 30 - 60 minutes of vigorous activity each day

- Take your children to the park to play.
- Encourage them to ride bikes around the neighborhood.
- Teach them to choose stairs over the elevator when possible.

**At least 60 minutes of *moderate- to vigorous-intensity* aerobic activity Every day** (22)

- Take a walk around the block as a family before or after dinner.
- If you're stuck inside because of bad weather, put on an exercise video or an active video game that calls for high levels of motion and activity.

### Turn off the TV

Keep the television off when no one is watching and during mealtime and homework hours.

- Allow no snacking while watching TV.
- Only allow 1 hour of screen time per day, with perhaps even less time on school nights.
- Keep TVs and computers out of the bedroom.



When kids know that parents value healthful eating and staying active, they will do the same and are more likely to carry those values into adulthood.

### Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development

#WeeklyBlogPost

When it comes to raising children, parents should fully understand that physical maturity does not equal moral maturity.

Just as every individual person is different, every child is different. Becoming a teen does not automatically translate into becoming more moral.



*For practical information on fostering moral development in children,*

**[CLICK HERE](#) (23)**  
and **please, leave a comment!**

***We love to hear from our readers and hope to receive your feedback!***

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*Don't hesitate to contact us with your questions and comments. We look forward to hearing from you.*

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2 <https://medlineplus.gov/obesity.html>

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5 <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/obesity-prevention-source/obesity-causes/television-and-sedentary-behavior-and-obesity/>

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9 <http://frac.org/obesity-health/low-income-food-insecure-people-vulnerable-poor-nutrition-obesity>

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