Safe kids Healthy kids Happy kids

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School-Age Obesity – Know Your Child's Risks

In the last three decades, the number of obese children in the U.S. has more than tripled. Teenage obesity is at its highest level in U.S. history. This childhood obesity epidemic affects a child's psychological and physical health.

Obesity is a disease. Overweight children are at risk of:

- **High blood pressure, high cholesterol and abnormal lipid levels.** These lead to heart disease and stroke.
- **Insulin resistance and type 2 diabetes.** Type 2 diabetes, once an adult disease, now occurs in many obese children. It is preventable.
- **Bone and joint problems.** Active children have stonger bones than children who are less active. One study compared normal weight children to overweight children. Thirteen percent of overweight kids had at least one broken bone. Only 4 % of the normal weight kids had ever broken a bone.
- **Shortness of breath.** This makes sports and physical exercise hard. As a result, many avoid physical activity.
- **Sleep problems.** Obese children are at risk for sleep apnea. Tired kids have problems at school and do not exercise. Their lack of exercise causes further weight gain.
- **A tendency to mature earlier.** They may be taller and more sexually mature than their peers.
- **Missing school.** One study suggests that overweight children were absent 20% more than normal weight children. Not attending school affects academic success. It is also linked to risky behavior, like taking drugs.
- **Social discrimination, isolation and depression.** Overweight kids are often teased and bullied. Many are the last to be picked as playmates. They lose self-esteem and often isolate themselves from others.

Parents must take the lead in helping their children live a healthy life style.

- **Take your child to a doctor.** Find out if he is overweight or obese. Follow your doctor's advice.
- **Focus on your child's strengths and talents – not her weight.**
- **Show love and respect to your child.**
- **Provide healthy food for the whole family.** Decrease the amount of fat, sugar and salt in your diet. Add more fresh fruits and vegetables.
- **Stock your refrigerator and shelves with healthy snacks.** Kids will eat what you buy.
- **Increase the family's physical activity.** Decrease the amount of time spent in front of the TV and computer.
- **Avoid using food as a reward.** Never withhold food as a punishment.

Some overweight kids many not need to lose weight. If they reduce their rate of weight gain, they can grow into their weight. *Any weight program should be supervised by a doctor.*