

Riley Speaks

Take Action Against Childhood Obesity

In the past three decades, the rate of childhood obesity has tripled for children 6 to 11 years old — and doubled for adolescents ages 12 to 19. With these trends on the rise, it's not surprising that childhood obesity is the biggest health issue facing America's youth. As a parent, you can take action today to help your child achieve a healthier weight.

HOW IS OBESITY DEFINED?

The word “obese” can be hurtful, especially to children. It's important to note that this term refers to a person's body mass index, or BMI, which is calculated from one's weight and height.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has developed BMI charts for children that are age- and gender-specific. Based on these charts, obesity refers to children who have a BMI equal to or greater than the 95th percentile.

You can learn more about calculating BMI for children at www.cdc.gov.

WHAT CAUSES OBESITY?

While many factors are at play, the biggest culprits are poor eating habits and lack of physical activity. Collectively, these are known as lifestyle factors.

WHAT ARE THE HEALTH RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH CHILDHOOD OBESITY?

For one, obese children often become obese adults. In fact, 30 percent of adult obesity begins in childhood. Obesity can lead to a host of other health issues, including diabetes, high cholesterol, heart disease, high blood pressure, depression and liver disease.

HOW CAN I HELP MY CHILD ACHIEVE A HEALTHIER WEIGHT?

Behavior and lifestyle changes — namely proper nutrition and increased physical activity — can help significantly. When it comes to nutrition, it's not only what your child eats, but also how much. Managing portion size is key. For example, a serving of pasta should be no bigger than the size of a computer mouse. A serving of meat should be the same size as the palm of your hand or a deck of playing cards. The goal is to aim for healthy meals and healthy eating patterns.

It's important to increase your child's daily physical activity. This includes everything from sports and other vigorous activities, to walking to school and other routine tasks, to joining school or community programs that promote physical activity. Simple changes include:

- parking farther away from the grocery store entrance
- removing the television from your child's bedroom
- keeping the remote near the television rather than where your child is sitting.

As a goal, target between 30 and 60 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity every day.



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WHAT ABOUT MEDICATION OR WEIGHT-LOSS SURGERY?

Medication or surgery might be an option for your child, but you should discuss these treatment approaches with your child's physician. Your physician also might recommend a structured lifestyle modification program, such as Riley's Pediatric OverWeight Education and Research, or POWER, program.

WHAT CAN I BEGIN DOING TODAY TO HELP MY CHILD?

Here are some practical tips that will get your child on a healthier track:

- Change from full-dairy products to low-fat dairy.
- Limit the number of high-calorie beverages, including fruit juices and sodas. Drink more water instead.
- Try baking, grilling or broiling instead of frying.
- Swap sweet snacks for fruit, and crunchy or salty snacks for veggies.
- Eat at a designated place, for example, the kitchen or dining room table.
- Incorporate healthy snacks into your child's day.
- Encourage active play every day. Go ahead and break a sweat!

Research has shown that these actions, too, make a difference:

- Limit your child's "screen" time to two hours a day.
- Eat breakfast daily.
- Limit eating at restaurants, especially fast-food establishments.
- Manage portion sizes.
- Eat meals as a family.
- As a parent, be authoritative — not authoritarian.



For more information, visit rileyhospital.org.




SCHOOL OF MEDICINE
INDIANA UNIVERSITY

 **Riley**
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AND Riley Hospital North

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