

Are our children simply just becoming too fat?

A new study published in the British Medical Journal (BMJ), has identified eight risk factors for childhood obesity. These factors include -:

- (1) Three year-old children who spend more than eight hours per week watching television face an increased risk of becoming obese.
- (2) Increasing birth weight.
- (3) Obesity in one or both parents.
- (4) Getting less than 10.5 hours sleep per night at age three.
- (5) Rapid weight gain in the first year
- (6) Rapid catch up growth between birth and two years
- (7) Size in early life
- (8) Early development of body fatness before the age of 5 or 6.

While the authors of this study admit that the precise way in which these factors might increase the risk of obesity was complex, they are still worth considering.

For instance, parental obesity could increase the risk via genetics or by shared family characteristics, such as shared preference for certain types of food. The amount of sleep of a child could affect growth hormone secretion, reduce the child's exposure to food intake in the evening or could be affected by the amount of physical activity taken in during the day. Finally, watching television could confer risk through a reduction in energy expenditure or an increase food intake.

Childhood obesity is becoming a major issue worldwide and as we so often profess to love our children dearly, we must become aware that if we are not careful, we could be indirectly providing the environment for our children becoming obese.

Let's look at an actual case

Smart and funny, Jay Reilly is a 13 year old computer whiz kid who loves fast foods and computer games. He boasts that he could play such games for three hours at a time. However, last year a strange lethargy overtook him.

He could barely stay awake in class. He couldn't keep his eyes open long enough to complete his homework at night and from being a straight A student, his grades began slipping. He forgot many things and became very moody.

His parents were quite alarmed about the changes and took him to the doctor where a blood test indicated that Jay was in the early stages of diabetes. Further testing confirmed that his blood sugar and insulin levels were abnormally high and he was on the verge of developing Type 2 Diabetes. His cholesterol was also high. (Remember that this is a 13 year old boy).

His parents were totally surprised with the diagnosis. In the first instance, they thought that Diabetes was an adult disease and secondly, Jay had no previous medical history. How was it possible for him to have these symptoms? Quite simply – his lifestyle. The thought of the serious complications that faced Jay, including blindness, kidney or heart failure frightened Jay's parents.

Looking back, his parents and doctor realized that Jay had all the signs of impending diabetes: He was overweight, carried excess weight around his middle and was physically inactive.

Fortunately his parents caught the disease in time and were able to counter it with some aggressive action. Jay had to immediately embark on a programme to lose weight and lower his blood sugar, insulin and cholesterol levels through diet and exercise. Immediately he gave up junk food, soda, sugary juices and starchy foods. He also spent

less time on the computer and in front of the television. He was now more into riding his bicycle and spending time outdoors where he would be involved in some form of physical activity.

In a matter of two months, Jay's cholesterol, blood sugar and insulin levels had significantly dropped and he had lost a lot of the excess weight he was carrying. He was on his way to improving his health and life.

(Source: Sunday Guardian, August 21, 2005)

Think about these facts!

- Oversized kids are causing supersized worries for doctors, hospitals and government policy makers.
- More than 9 million Americans are considered overweight today – triple the number since 1980.
- A child who is obese has a 90% chance of becoming an adult who is obese.
- Overweight and obese children have a greater risk of developing serious life-threatening diseases.
- Today's teenagers are projected to live shorter lives than their parents due to obesity.
- The percentage of obese children worldwide is increasing steadily.
- Dr. Michael Goler, Pediatrician, has stated that today, children are on an average 9 pounds overweight compared with children in 1966. He continued that kids are definitely in serious trouble due to obesity. Dr. Goler has emphatically stated that diabetes is no longer an adult disease. It is starting to become an adolescent disease.
- Obese teens who grow up to be obese adults are looking at even greater health threats in the future.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report that being overweight or obese, increases the risk of other diseases and health conditions including hypertension, high cholesterol, coronary heart disease, stroke, gallbladder disease, osteoarthritis, sleep and respiratory problems and some cancers including endometrial, breast and colon cancer.

Obesity in childhood is not an individual problem – it's a family problem. Obesity runs in the family. Kids raised in homes with poor dietary habits and lifestyles are likely to be overweight or obese.

Parents should teach children by encouraging them to:

- (a) Choose food portions that are no larger than your fist.
- (b) Know the difference between 'go foods' like fruits and vegetables, and 'slow foods' which are occasional weekend treats like pancakes with syrup, chicken and chips and a host of other fried foods too numerous to mention.
- (c) Substitute water and fat free milk for sweetened drinks such as soft drinks.
- (d) Get at least one hour of physical activity daily.
- (e) Reduce television, video games and even time spent on the computer.
- (f) Eat the recommended servings of fruits and vegetables each day.

Children learn by imitating. If you expect your kids to do any of the above, you, as parents must also do the same.

It's harder to change a child's poor behaviours the older he gets

Encourage children to move on their own power

Childhood Obesity Quiz

(American Dietetic Association; 12th May, 2005)

Answer the following questions. Score each answer in the following way:

2 points for **YES**

1 point for **SOMETIMES**

0 points for **NO**

1. *Do you and your family have regularly scheduled meals at home?*
2. *Do you eat meals together at least once per day?*
3. *Do you actually plan snacks?*
4. *Are portioned sizes tailored to each person's needs?*
5. *Do you eat three meals every day?*
6. *Do you try to make mealtimes enjoyable?*
7. *Do you avoid making everyone eat everything on their plate?*
8. *Do meals last more than fifteen (15) minutes?*
9. *Do you eat only in designated areas of the house?*
10. *Do you avoid using food to punish or reward?*
11. *Do you enjoy physical activities together once or twice a week?*

Add up your points.

If you scored between **20 – 22 points**, *you and your family are on the right track.*

If you scored between **13 -19 points**, *you and your family are doing okay but could use some work on areas where you answered 'no' or 'sometimes'.*

If you scored **12 or lower**, *you need to reorganize and get some help right away on healthy eating.*

Eat Healthy!

Stay Healthy!!

Enjoy a healthy lifestyle!!!