

## YOUNG HEAVY WEIGHTS

### Obese vs. Overweight

A growing number of children are tipping the scales in doctor's offices. According to the Canadian Pediatric Society, childhood obesity has tripled between 1981 and 1996. Overweight children have a high risk of becoming overweight adults and developing serious health conditions such as Type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure and stroke. There's a difference, however, between an obese and overweight child. Since BMI doesn't measure body fat directly, it's very possible to be overweight but not obese. If your child is very athletic or has a significant amount of muscle mass—and not excess body fat—there's no real need to be concerned about his or her weight. However, a great majority of overweight children are obese because of the excess body fat they're carrying around and weight loss should be of the utmost concern.

### Your Child's BMI

Dr. Danielle Grenier, medical affairs officer of the Canadian Pediatric Society, says “tracking a child's BMI is good, but it's not practical to do so in every case since it's not a very accurate measurement of obesity in children like it is in adults. If you're concerned about your child's BMI, keep these tips in mind before putting your child on a crash diet:

- BMI is a guideline. It does not measure bone, fat or muscle.
- BMI values considered "appropriate" increase with age.
- There is no "right" BMI value for any single child at any age.

- BMI values should not be compared between children.
- A high or low BMI value isn't always a cause for concern.
- If you have concerns about your child's weight, see a physician.

### **Help Your Child Lose Weight**

If you have a child who needs to lose weight—it's not just your child's issue—it's your whole family's issue. The eating habits of the entire family need to change for the overweight child to be successful at losing weight. Many parents seem to think that more of a good thing is better. On the contrary, too many calories of anything will pack the weight on. Too much milk and juice can actually be a problem even though these are good sources of nutrients in the right portions

As an adult, you know there's no quick fix to losing weight, and the same goes for kids. It requires a long-term approach in lifestyle and eating habits that need to be part of your family's daily routine. But it can be done. Here are some tips on how to do it:

- **Make it a family issue.** It's important for the entire family to be on board with a common goal concerning health.
- **Focus on health goals instead of physical appearance goals.** Always try to emphasize the health benefits of exercise including mental strength and de-emphasize a desired physique.
- **Increase your family's activity level.** Create opportunities to get outside and be more active such as walking to taking a family bike ride. Everyone will feel better.
- **Decrease the availability of unhealthy food choices in your home.** It's not necessary to demonize junk food—just make sure to limit the amount you keep in the house.

- **Be supportive.** Losing weight is extremely hard to do without some sort of support from friends and family.

**So make sure to be supportive of your child and provide a lot of encouragement.**

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