

Obesity can be predicted as early as 6 months of age, says study

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Severe obesity can be predicted using a simple body mass index (BMI) measurement as early as 6 months of age, according to a new study. The study is believed to be the first to show that weight gain during infancy differs in those who eventually develop obesity.

The study will be presented April 1 at the national Endocrine Society meeting in Boston.

"BMI at 6, 12 or 18 months of age above the 85th percentile on the growth chart can accurately predict children at risk for early childhood obesity," says Allison Smego, MD, a fellow in the division of Endocrinology at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Center and the study's lead author. "These children have a high lifetime risk for persistent obesity and metabolic disease and should be monitored closely at a very young age."

The researchers studied several groups of children of lean and obese children under the age of 6, including a group of severely obese children referred for specialized care to Cincinnati Children's.

All participants were selected based on BMI between the ages of 2 and 6. In all, 783 lean and 480 severely obese participants were included. The trajectories of BMI in children who become severely obese by age 6 began to differ from children who remain normal weight at about 4 months of age. Results of the study were validated in a population of young children seen in a hospital-based pediatric clinic in Denver to

ensure that the findings applied to other groups of children.

"It's not currently recommended to measure BMI in children under the age of 2, but we say it should be because we now know it predicts [obesity risk](#) later," says Dr. Smego. "Pediatricians can identify high-risk infants with BMI above the 85th percentile and focus additional counseling and education regarding healthy lifestyles toward the families of these children. Our hope in using this tool is that we can prevent [obesity](#) in early childhood."

Provided by Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center

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