

# How to help when your child weighs too much

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(HealthDay)—Seventeen percent of American children and teens are

obese and a nearly equal number are overweight, and those who are taunted about their weight tend to gain even more in response, according to a study from the U.S. National Institutes of Health.

What's even worse, [excess weight](#) puts youngsters at risk for lifelong health problems. But you don't have to stand by helpless. The Endocrine Society Task Force has guidelines to help kids lose weight through [lifestyle changes](#)—challenging yet doable.

First, engage your pediatrician in the process. He or she can determine the right number of calories for your child and help you find the most important lifestyle modifications to make at home. To be successful, these changes need to be family-centered, not just aimed at the child.

Key dietary steps are to cut down on unhealthy and high-calorie fast foods; sugar-sweetened beverages; foods with added sugars and [high-fructose corn syrup](#); high-fat, high-sodium foods, processed foods; and, for kids over age 2, foods that are high in saturated fat.

Practice—and teach kids how to practice—portion control. Use single portion packaging for acceptable snacks, plan regular meals, and help them avoid constant "grazing" during the day, especially after school and after supper. Make sure their calories come from the recommended intake of dietary fiber, protein, fruits and vegetables, not junk [food](#).

Encourage daily exercise. Kids should start with 20 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity daily and gradually work up to an hour a day. Short blocks of exercise are great alternatives when a kid wants to eat because of boredom or stress—be alert to these eating cues that have nothing to do with hunger and step in with ideas.

Help kids avoid sedentary pastimes like playing video games and watching TV. Limit screen time to one to two hours a day.

Be patient and aim for gradual results. Weight-loss ("bariatric") surgery and medication are options only in extreme situations, once a child has reached a certain age and meets other criteria.

**More information:** The U.S. National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases has advice for parents who want to [help an overweight child](#) develop healthier habits.

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