

Consumer health: Why your child's weight matters

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Healthy Weight Week will be observed Jan. 15-21, so this is a good time for a reminder of the connection between weight and health during

childhood.

The [prevalence of obesity](#) in adults in the U.S. increased from 30.5% to 41.9% from 1999-2020, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The prevalence of severe obesity increased from 4.7% to 9.2% in the same time frame. And the rate of childhood obesity is a serious problem in the U.S., as well.

Childhood obesity is particularly troubling because the extra pounds often start [children](#) on the path to health problems that once were considered adult problems.

Being overweight or obese is a risk factor for:

- Several types of cancer, including breast, ovarian, esophageal, stomach, pancreatic, colon, rectal and prostate
- Heart disease
- Stroke
- High blood pressure
- Sleep apnea
- Type 2 diabetes
- Osteoarthritis

Also, children who have obesity may experience teasing or bullying by their peers. This can result in a loss of self-esteem and an increased risk of depression and anxiety.

What can you do?

Here are some ways you can help your child achieve and maintain a healthy weight:

- Set a good example. Make [healthy eating](#) and regular physical

activity a family affair. Everyone will benefit and no one will feel singled out.

- Have healthy snacks available. Options include air-popped popcorn without butter, fruits with low-fat yogurt, baby carrots with hummus, or whole-grain cereal with low-fat milk.
- Offer new foods multiple times. Don't be discouraged if your child doesn't immediately like a new food. It usually takes multiple exposures to a food to gain acceptance.
- Choose nonfood rewards. Promising candy for good behavior is a bad idea.
- Be sure your child gets enough sleep. Some studies indicate that too little sleep may increase the risk of obesity. Sleep deprivation can cause hormonal imbalances that lead to increased appetite.

Treatment for childhood obesity is based on your child's age and whether there are other medical conditions. The first steps usually include changes in your child's eating habits and physical activity level. In certain circumstances, treatment might include medications or weight-loss surgery.

Treating and preventing [childhood obesity](#) helps protect your child's health now and in the future.

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