

WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP MY CHILD COPE WITH BEING OVERWEIGHT?

Children like to be consulted, respected and praised. Above all, they need to feel loved and valued. You should be sensitive to how aware your child is of weight issues. We find that some children are worried about being too fat, but find it difficult to talk to their parents.

Parents too tell us that they avoid talking to their children about weight, fearing that to do so may cause their child to develop an eating disorder. You can talk to your child about weight and eating, and you and the family can work together to have a more healthy lifestyle.



CHILDHOOD OBESITY

Your questions answered

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IS MY CHILD OVERWEIGHT?

As a parent, you will have a good idea that there is a problem if clothes that fit your child in height are much too tight round the waist.

The medical definition is based on height and weight; this is called the body mass index (BMI). Children's BMI measurements must be plotted on a chart specifically for children, rather than assessed using the BMI ranges used for adults.

You can visit the Weight Concern website and use our Children's BMI calculator or visit your doctor/practice nurse who will have the correct charts to assess your child's BMI. Obesity means extreme overweight.

WHY DO CHILDREN BECOME OVERWEIGHT?

The causes of obesity are not yet fully understood, but we know it's partly genetic. If both parents are overweight the child has a 70% chance of being overweight. If one parent is overweight, the chance is 30%, and if neither parent is overweight, then their child would have a 10% chance of being overweight as an adult. This is due to parents passing on to their children genes which affect their risk of gaining weight.

The environment in which children grow up also makes a difference. Children from modern Britain or America - where most of us eat a lot and aren't very active are more likely to become overweight than children brought up where food is in short supply. In the past, there has been a tendency to 'blame' parents if their child is overweight, but we now know that this is wrong.

WILL MY CHILD GROW OUT OF IT?

Some children slim down as they get older, so it's important not to get too concerned about weight. However it is important for your child to learn about a healthy lifestyle (healthy eating and taking regular exercise) from a young age, to help them avoid being overweight in later life.

WILL BEING OVERWEIGHT AFFECT MY CHILD'S HEALTH?

Overweight children are at risk of developing diabetes. They may also have higher blood pressure and higher cholesterol, which could increase their risk of heart disease in later life. Some overweight children find it hard to be active because they are unfit. Others are embarrassed about playing games and sports. Either way they lose out on the health benefits of physical activity.

Overweight children are sometimes teased or bullied at school, or even by other members of the family. This can affect your child's body image, self-esteem, and mood.

IS THERE ANYTHING THAT I CAN DO TO REDUCE MY CHILD'S WEIGHT?

Eating a healthy diet and leading an active life will give your child the greatest chance of avoiding further weight gain. The best results come from the whole family following a healthy diet, rather than insisting only your child eats differently. It's not a good idea to restrict the amount of food your child eats at meals without medical advice, but it is well worth making sure that the types of foods your child is served are high in nutritional value and low in fat and sugar.

Eating healthily can benefit the whole family, whether they are overweight or not, so we recommend that you make your home a healthy food zone. If you would like to know more about healthy eating for your child, please contact Weight Concern for an information booklet.

At the same time it's important for the whole family to do plenty of physical activity and to avoid spending lots of time in sedentary pastimes. Encourage your child to walk rather than take the car or public transport wherever possible. You yourself can set a good example. Walking, swimming, cycling, running are all good for health and tend to prevent weight gain.

If you are concerned about your child's weight, you can ask your doctor for advice. Your doctor could refer you to a paediatrician or a dietitian, for advice on how to manage your child's weight.

