

## **CHILDHOOD OBESITY**

As you have likely seen on recent health stories in the media, obesity among children is at an all time high in the USA. Obesity is medically defined as an individual who is more than 20 to 30% over what is considered their healthy weight for their age, sex, and height. According to the American Obesity Association, approximately 30 percent of children and adolescents (ages 6-19 yr.) are overweight. About 15 percent of these children already meet the definition of obese. If corrective behavior modification is not undertaken, studies indicate that 70% of this group will remain overweight or obese as adults.

People who are obese are subjected to many health risk factors. Among those are heart disease, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, Type II diabetes and some forms of cancer. Obesity and being over weight are closely linked to Type II diabetes.

There are various causes of why one is over weight. While we have no control over our genetics, we can address the more common causes of lifestyle, physical inactivity and unhealthy eating patterns. If one or both parents are obese, their children are more likely to be overweight. Generally, this is not heredity at work, but rather the result of the child following the parents eating and lifestyle habits.

In today's world, by choice, we have become very sedentary in our everyday lifestyle. We spent far more time watching TV, surfing the internet on our computers and playing video games in our daily living than engaging in any type of physical activity.

If your child is over weight be sure to let them know that they are loved. They need a lot of support and encouragement from you. Let them know you love them unconditionally. Focus on your child's positive qualities, not their weight. They know they are different; they don't have to be reminded. Gradually increase your family's physical activity and work to change their eating patterns. This will help you help both yourself and your child. Many children who are over weight can reduce their rate of gain by maintaining their weight as they grow. They eventually will 'grow' into their weight.

Weight loss should be gradual, not rapid. If your child is over weight, avoid the use of weight reduction pills, and crash diets. These can cause a compromise in growth and the health of your child. Instead, work to improve your diet and exercise routines.

Follow the food pyramid; the milk group, meat group, vegetable group, fruit group and the bread group. Aim for the 5 food groups each day. Discourage eating snacks while watching TV. Next, strive to increase your daily physical activity to work up to 30 minutes for adults and 60 minutes for children 3 to 4 times a week.

Ginny Heffelmire

A balanced diet with a decrease in caloric intake coupled with an increase of physical activity will always result in weight loss. But always remember to consult with your child's healthcare provider before starting any weight reduction regimen.

As always, if you have any questions or comments, eMail me at

[gheffelmire@dearborncounty.in.gov](mailto:gheffelmire@dearborncounty.in.gov)