

Childhood obesity - what parents can do

by Dr. Delia Chiamonte, [Baltimore Health Examiner](#)



One in five children in America is obese. And ten percent of those kids are less than five years old. What is going on? Is there anything that you can do?

The bad news is that many of those children are already laying down cholesterol plaques in their arteries that will show up as heart attacks in another 50 years or so. The good news is there is a lot that you can do to prevent your child from becoming obese.

- Breastfeed. Research suggests that breastfeeding exclusively for at least 4-6 months can help prevent infants from becoming obese children
- Don't offer sweets early. According to the Institute of Medicine, early introduction of sweet and fatty foods may contribute to obesity in older children
- Control portion size. Rather than handing your child the picnic sized bag of chips to munch from, take out a hand full and put it on his plate
- Encourage kids to stop eating when they are full. Banish the 'clean your plate' rule
- Cut back on fruit juice. Juice is a closer relative to soda than you might think. Both are loaded with sugar. Occasional juice is fine, but encourage water or low fat milk when your child is thirsty
- Keep healthy food options in the house. Children are predisposed to enjoy sweet and fatty foods. They need practice eating healthier alternatives in order for them to become part of their routine
- Encourage family meals. Studies show that the more often families eat together, the more fruits, veggies, whole grains and calcium rich foods kids consume and the less junk food they eat
- Avoid sodas. Sodas are empty calories that don't fill you up. They are basically liquid sugar – treat them more like a dessert than a drink

- Encourage physical activity. Try to make being active a part of your life. Walk to school, ride bikes to the store, play outside
- Decrease screen time. Watching more than 2 hours of screen time per day is associated with obesity. This includes TV, computer time and video games
- Don't eat in front of the TV. Studies show that both kids and adults consume more calories when they eat in front of the TV. This is thought to be due to distraction, but all those food commercials probably don't help
- Model healthy behaviors. Your kids are always watching you. If vegetables are a part of your life, they will become part of your kids' lives too

We tend to worry about car wrecks and bike accidents and other threats to our kids' health. Yet we may let them eat pizza and soda in front of the TV and watch a movie after hours of video game play. Childhood obesity is not just socially stigmatizing, it is the gateway to a lifetime of life-threatening health risks.

You have the power. You are the parent. You can make a difference.

(picture courtesy of tabletgrave.com)

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