

Preventing Obesity in Children & Teens

Parents often assume a child will grow out of his or her “baby fat” and are not concerned about the overweight toddler. While the family may think that the child will slim down over time, I am seeing more children have health problems related to weight at an early age. As a pediatrician, parents often ask excellent questions about their child’s growth and development.

I always start by reminding a family that their child should be seen at least once a year for a complete physical. When there are concerns regarding a child who may be overweight, more frequent visits are required to track weight changes and any other medical concerns.

What causes weight gain?

Weight gain among children is usually the result of the same behaviors that we see in adults, a combination of overeating and too little activity. Families also forget that all juices are full of sugar and can also be a significant source of extra calories that do not benefit a child.

While there are medical conditions that can also have an effect on your child’s weight, these are rare and should be identified by a physician.

Why is monitoring children’s weight important?

Setting up unhealthy behaviors today sets precedence for overweight children to become overweight and unhealthy adults and brings an increased risk of Type 2 diabetes and heart disease.

What can you do to help your child?

Rather than focusing on your child losing a specific amount of weight, parents should guide their children toward healthy eating and exercise habits. Children are much more likely to lose weight and feel good about their bodies if the family as a whole makes activity and dietary changes. If an individual child is placed on a diet, the child is more likely to feel isolated and may actually sneak food.

To start, parents can limit the amount of high sugar, high calorie foods and drinks they bring home from the grocery store. Children cannot snack on high calorie treats if they are not available in the home. Maintaining

a supply of fresh fruit and other low calorie snacks such as yogurt or pretzels can help a child avoid choosing a high calorie food when hungry.

The amount of food is just as important as the quality of food in the house. The availability of bulk purchasing of different foods such as pretzels or cereals has made it much less expensive to buy a big bag. Families can avoid eating the whole bag at one time by dividing the contents into a number of smaller bags.

Unfortunately, many of the overweight children I see today don’t get enough exercise. Encourage your children to join a sports team or play outside. To reinforce an active lifestyle try to participate as a family in physical activities such as walks, trips to the park or bicycling.

Before extra weight can grow into a lifelong problem, children and their parents can take these simple and important steps to improve their physical health both immediately and into adulthood.

This message is brought to you by Copper Queen Medical Associates.

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Pediatrician Rachel Camp, MD,MPH

joined the Copper Queen Community Hospital in August and is available at the Douglas Rural Health Clinic for appointments. For information and scheduling, please call 520-364-7659. Dr. Camp recently completed her pediatric residency at the University of Rochester, where she practiced at the Golisano Children’s Hospital in Rochester, N.Y. In 2009, she received her doctor of medicine degree from the University of Arizona in Tucson, where she also completed a Master’s of Public Health and Bachelor of Science degree in nursing.

