

WEIGHT REDUCTION FOR OVERWEIGHT CHILDREN

Is My Child Overweight?

Ask yourself:

- Would my child appear to be overweight to an objective person?
- Does my child weight more than 20% over the ideal weight for his or her height?
- Is the skin fold thickness (fat layer) of my child's upper arm more than 1 inch?

NOTE: More than 25% of American children ARE overweight!

What Causes Children to Become Overweight?

Fewer than 1% of obesity is caused by an underlying medical condition. Usually, the tendency to be overweight is **inherited**. Mild obesity (up to 30 pounds overweight in an adult) is usually hereditary in nature. Moderate obesity is attributable to a combination of **heredity, overeating, and inactivity** (The average American child spends about 24 hours per week watching television. The growing popularity of television and computer and video games has contributed greatly to childhood obesity in America.)

Helping Your Child Lose Weight

Between ages 5 and 15, it is very difficult for children to lose weight. They have access to so many foods outside the home and are not easily motivated to lose weight. Losing weight, and keeping it off, is difficult work. The best age is older than 15 years, when children typically become very concerned about appearance.

SELF-ESTEEM

Family support is extremely important for the overweight child, whose self-esteem is probably already challenged. The best way for a family to help an overweight child is for the entire family to change their physical activity levels and eating habits, rather than singling out one child.

DIET

Avoid:

- Telling your child that he or she is fat
- Putting your child on a strict diet
- Depriving your child of food when he or she says they are hungry
- Nagging your child about weight or eating habits

Instead:

- Set a reasonable weight loss goal (about 1 pound per week is attainable, but still hard work)

- Encourage habits that can last a lifetime, as the overweight child will probably always have a tendency to be overweight:
 - Three meals per day
 - Drink a glass of water before each meal
 - No forbidden foods; only forbidden portions
 - Encourage average portions; discourage “seconds”
 - Discourage “shortcuts” such as fasting, crash dieting, or diet pills
 - Eat slowly
 - Plan for healthy snacks such as fruits, vegetables, popcorn, bread and crackers with fruit spread or fat-free cheese, and low-fat frozen desserts
- Reward hard work with a movie, television, music, or a new book rather than with food.
- Fill after-school time with activities—music, drama, sports, or even visiting with friends—rather than snacking.

EXERCISE

Exercising daily can speed up the weight loss process as well as increase your child’s sense of physical well-being.

- Walk or bike rather than ride in a car
- Stairs rather than elevators
- Learn new sports
- Walk the dog
- Spend 30 minutes per day exercising or dancing to music
- Limit television. Use an exercise bike or hula hoop while watching television.