

# A Parent's Guide to Children's Weight



## How do I know if my child is overweight?

The Body Mass Index (BMI) is a way to check if a child is too heavy for his or her height. Growth charts have been made to compare a child's BMI to other children at the same age. Your Practice Nurse can record your child's BMI and track it over time to check how your child is doing.

## How does a child's weight affect their health?

Children who are very overweight face the same health risks as overweight adults in that they are more likely to develop diabetes at any time and heart disease later in life.

## Problems with being an overweight child include:

- Poor self esteem
- Depression
- High blood pressure
- Asthma
- Poor exercise capability
- Difficulty breathing during sleep
- Bowed legs
- Flat feet
- Falls and arm fractures
- Underdevelopment of sexual organs (boys)
- Poor functioning ovaries (girls)
- Gallstones
- Persistent chest infections
- Delayed wound healing
- High blood fats
- Fatty liver
- Diabetes
- Kidney disease

On top of this, overweight children are often picked on and bullied at school.

*Source: Ebbeling, C.B., Pawlak, D.B., and Ludwig, D.S. (2002) Child obesity: public health crisis, common sense cure. The Lancet 360: 473-482.*



## How can I help my child achieve a more healthy weight?

Simply speaking, weight is influenced by two things, the food we eat and the activity we do. Genetics, family and social factors also play a role. The best thing you can do to help your child achieve a healthy weight is to make changes to your family's lifestyle to include more physical activity, and less high fat and high sugar foods.



Weight management programmes for all but the most severely overweight children and adolescents should not focus on weight loss. Instead the goal is to maintain weight while the child gets taller and more muscular over time.

A child is much more likely to succeed if the whole family adopts healthy behaviours. When all family members join in positive activities, you'll not only help your overweight child, you'll also become a healthier and closer family.



# Suggestions for becoming a healthier family

- Eat out less and buy less takeaways
  - Children consume more energy when meals are eaten at restaurants than at home
- Try not to have a TV or computer in the bedroom and decrease television viewing time (ideally < 1 hour per day)
- Try to have family meals at the dinner table with the television switched off
  - This reduces TV viewing time and improves diet quality
- Use smaller plates - over the last 20 years average portion size has dramatically increased
- Introduce new foods gradually
  - Focus on eating behaviours rather than a diet e.g. avoid sugar containing drinks (including fruit drinks)
- Support participation in physical activity
  - Encourage family involvement in regular physical activity
  - Walk instead of taking the car or bus
- Be a positive role model - set a good example with healthy eating and increased activity
- Children generally eat what is available at home - carefully look at what you buy at the supermarket and do not always get what everybody wants!