

Obesity is an increasing problem for children and adults. There is no quick and easy way for kids to lose weight, and unfortunately, many overweight kids end up becoming overweight adults. Obese kids may be prone to low self-esteem and depression that stems from being teased, bullied, or rejected by peers. Risk factors present in childhood (including high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and diabetes) can lead to serious medical problems like heart disease, heart failure, and stroke as adults. Preventing or treating overweight and obesity in kids may reduce the risk of developing these disease as they get older.

The key to keeping kids of all ages at a healthy weight is taking a whole-family approach. It's the "practice what you preach" mentality. Make healthy eating and exercise a family affair. Get your kids involved by letting them help you plan and prepare healthy meals, and take them along when you go grocery shopping so they can learn how to make good food choices.

Tips, to both prevent obesity and help your child lose weight, include:

- Limiting the number of calories that your child drinks. Sticking to the recommended limits of 4-6 ounces of 100% fruit juice for children under age 6 years and only 8-12 ounces for older children can help to limit excessive weight gain.
- Limiting the amount of milk that younger children drink. Too much milk can lead to your child becoming overweight. Children usually only need about 16-24 ounces of milk each day.
- Avoiding frequent meals of fast food.
- Don't 'super size' your child's meals.
- Don't force younger children to 'clean their plates.' They can stop eating when they are full.
- Encourage daily regular exercise and physical activity. This may include going for walks as a family, playing outside, riding a bike, or participating in organized sports, like soccer and baseball.
- Limit inactivity by setting strict limits on watching television and playing computer and video games.
- Avoiding allowing your children eat while watching TV. Instead, limit meals to the dinner table.
- Don't put too much of a focus on what your child eats. Instead, offer a healthy diet with 3 healthy meals (don't skip meals, especially breakfast) and a few snacks, and allow occasional treats. Talking to your child too much about calories, fat and dieting can actually cause more harm than good, leading to eating disorders.
- Know what your child is eating and where his calories are coming from.

Losing weight is not easy and you may need to get extra help for your child. This will likely include your Pediatrician, who can monitor your child's weight gain and loss every few months, but it might also include a Registered Dietician, who can help you come up with a more healthy diet for your family.

Most of all let your kids know you love them — no matter what their weight — and that you want to help them be happy and healthy.