

Obesity and Weight Loss in Teens – A Guide for Parents

Children and teens that are overweight or obese are at risk for developing serious health problems. These may include diabetes, coronary artery disease, stroke, hypertension, sleep apnea, and osteoarthritis, among others. As children and teens are becoming heavier, these health problems are seen at increasingly younger ages. As a parent, you can play a very important part in helping your child reach and attain a healthy weight which may decrease the risk of them developing these problems.

BMI – a measure of overweight and obesity

BMI is a number that compares weight to height. Using this number can help you know where your child is and what a healthy weight range for him/her would be. Each time you see the doctor, ask him what your child's BMI is and then using the chart on the right to find where your child's BMI falls.

My child's BMI: _____

Find your child's BMI			
If above these ranges, your child may be overweight or obese			
Age	Healthy BMI Range	Age	Healthy BMI Range
12	14.8 to 21.7	17	17.2 to 25.2
13	15.3 to 22.6	18	17.6 to 25.7
14	15.8 to 23.3	19	17.8 to 26.1
15	16.3 to 24.0	20+	18.5 to 24.9
16	16.8 to 24.7		

Energy Balance

Several factors contribute to overweight and obesity, such as family history and genetics. However, eating habits and behaviors play a very important part as well. Extra weight is put on when your teen eats more calories than they use. Balancing energy in (calories consumed) with energy out (calories used in exercise and other daily activities) is key to controlling weight.

For your child to achieve a healthy weight, changes will need to be made with both 'energy in' and 'energy out.'

Energy In (Food Eaten)

Goal: Limit consumption of foods higher in calories, fat, and sugar

Although your child may be older and eating many of their meals on their own or at school, you can still help them to make healthy choices in the food they eat.

- Have family meals. Meals eaten at home tend to be lower in added calories than foods eaten out. Everyone is busy, but setting aside even one night a week to have dinner together as a family can help.
- Use smaller plates and bowls when eating at home. This will help in keeping portion sizes smaller.
- Don't put the serving dishes of food on the table. It will not be as easy for your child to overeat if the food is not right in front of them.

- Have healthier foods available at home. If snacks such as chips, cookies and soda are in the cupboards, that is what your child will eat when they are hungry. Have cut up veggies in the fridge, fruit in a bowl on the counter, whole grain crackers in the cupboard.
- Make breakfast a priority.
- Eat smart when eating out. Choose restaurants that provide healthier alternatives. Share entrées as a family or take part of your meals home for later to help with cutting back on the amount of calories eaten.
- Don't completely cut out your child's favorite foods. You want them to enjoy eating – just watch portions.
- Set the example! You will not be able to get your child to make any changes in their diet if you are not making these same changes.

Energy Out (Exercise)

Goal: Help your child to increase their activity and exercise

Not all children are athletes, but all children can make activity a part of their lifestyle. Children and teens should be physically active for 60 minutes or more on most days of the week. This can be done in short amounts throughout the day.

- Exercise as a family! This can be as simple as going for a walk together in the evenings. Find activities that your child and your family enjoy and do them together.
- Limit the amount of time your child spends in front of the computer or television.
- Have your child help with household chores and cleaning.
- If available, find community or school sports teams and classes that your child can participate in
- Again, set the example!

Where to find more information:

BMI calculator for children/adolescents - <http://apps.nccd.cdc.gov/dnpabmi/>

Find healthy choices when eating out - <http://healthydiningfinder.com/>

Food Guide – nutrition tips - <http://www.choosemyplate.gov/>