



Helping your overweight child



Having an overweight child is definitely not the end of the world as this can be a reversible situation. It just takes a little time and small mind-altering techniques along with simple lifestyle modifications.

But before we can help a child, we need to know why he or she is overweight.

What causes obesity?

Genetics:

Some families are naturally lean. The people in these families don't think much about food and have an inherent signal that tells them to stop eating when they've satisfied their hunger. We're not talking about these people, we're talking about the numerous families that have to focus on good eating habits, and keep focused otherwise they gain weight.

Environment:

- **Food:** Temptation from the fast-food outlets beckon us; the wonderful assortment of pastries on every street corner, the ice cream in the fridge, the chips and cookies in the cupboards are magnets to us. Even carbonated drinks are a problem. A recent study published in The Lancet medical journal found a soft drink-obesity link in children. If they increased their daily soft drink intake, each extra soda made them 60 percent more likely to become obese, regardless of how many sodas they were drinking before.
- **Lack of activity:** Being inactive is well known as a cause of obesity. Watching too much television is another cause, according to a recently published study in Paediatrics. The researchers said the results are obesity, poor body image and decreased school performance.

So, we now know some of the causes of obesity. How do we help our overweight children?

It is widely accepted that overweight or obese children have a greater risk of growing up to be overweight or obese adults. We need to start by taking small steps to get their weight get under control while young.

Some tips:

- Do not nag, it's best to encourage.
- Have your children copy you. Set a good example by eating well and being active.
- Do not weigh them, you can tell by the way their clothes fit if they're losing weight, and if they are praise them and reward them (not with food).
- Work with them to maintain their weight as their height increases. This is not the time to try crash diets that could stunt their growth.

In the food arena:

- Make a shopping list with your children and only keep nutritious foods at home. Having unlimited sweets, chips and cookies around leads to unconscious eating - the type that leads to weight gain.
- Only cook enough for the family. If you cook too much, put away for leftovers.
- Let your children help in the kitchen.
- Have them drink milk, water and freshly squeezed fruit juices rather than pop.
- When eating out, let them enjoy a treat.

With activity:

- Encourage exercising, athletics or playing with friends.
- Encourage activities and hobbies like singing, reading, volunteering, painting, and community activities.
- Remove television sets from children's bedrooms. Limit their total media time to no more than one to one and a half hours of quality programming per day.
- Use the videocassette recorder to record high-quality, educational programming for children, or even get for them educational DVDs.
- Talk, play, sing and read together.

It is not as tough as it may seem and if we all make a small effort, we can lessen the damage caused by obesity. It's really worth trying!