

# FitFUTURE

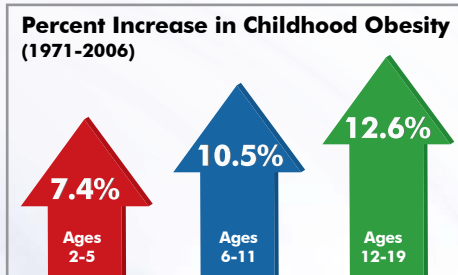
Strategies for  
Better Living.

## Childhood Obesity Advice for Parents



by Jennifer Kerr, MS, RD, CDN

**C**hildhood obesity is the leading threat to children ages two through 19 in the United States. Twenty-five million children are affected; that is one in every three American children. Described as our nation's greatest tragedy, this generation is expected to be the first to live shorter lives than their parents.



Source: [www.CDC.gov](http://www.CDC.gov) (National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey)

Year after year more children are suffering the effects of unhealthy eating and an inactive lifestyle. The number of overweight and obese children has tripled over the last forty years. Experts report continued increases in the number of children diagnosed with type 2 diabetes, a disease once known as "adult-onset diabetes." These young people risk facing complications like heart disease as early as their 30's. Overweight and obese children have an elevated risk for diabetes, heart disease, gastrointestinal problems, asthma, behavioral problems and depression. They are

often bullied, teased and suffer from low self-esteem.

When considering the direct and indirect costs of treating obesity-related health problems, the national cost is over \$100 billion dollars annually. Ten percent of medical dollars are spent on treating obesity-related illnesses in the United States.

**What causes obesity?** There are many factors involved; for one, many children have regular access to soda, high fat foods and sweets. In addition, there has been an on-going decline in the time spent on fitness and active play, as children spend hours in front of television, computer or video games.

No single solution to this problem exists. Changes are needed in government, communities, schools, doctor's offices, and at home. As a parent, you may be asking, what can I do right now?

### Take it one step at a time and follow these guidelines:

- Be active as a family; set regular fitness dates together.
- Turn off the screens (TV, computer, video games), limit these activities to two hours or less per day.
- Communicate positive messages about eating well and being active, instead of dieting and losing weight.
- Engage your children in the process of planning, shopping and preparing healthy meals and snacks.
- Never use food as reward or punishment.
- Make sure your children get at least nine hours of sleep per night.
- Do not provide them with soda or other sweetened beverages.
- Balance healthy foods with the occasional treat.
- Get specific advice from your child's medical doctor and consider meeting with a registered dietitian.
- Model the eating and activity behaviors you want your children to develop.

Sources:  
Center's for Disease Control and Prevention  
<http://www.cdc.gov>