



St. John's Episcopal Hospital

Preventing and Treating Childhood Obesity

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One out of three children in the United States is now considered overweight or obese. The levels of obesity in kids are so high today that it is considered an epidemic. The number of overweight children has doubled in the last two to three decades. The increase cuts across children and teens of all ages, races and genders.

There are a number of factors causing this epidemic. Genetics undoubtedly plays a role. However genetics alone cannot account for the huge increase in rates over the past few decades. Many children are spending less time exercising and more time in front of the TV. And today's busy families have fewer free moments to prepare nutritious, home-cooked meals, day in and day out.

Obesity can have significant health consequences, increasing the risk for serious conditions including type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol. Cardiovascular 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. Obese children may also be prone to low self-esteem that stems from being teased, bullied, or rejected by peers.

Preventing or treating overweight and obesity in kids may reduce the risk of developing cardiovascular disease as they get older.

Many kids don't get enough physical activity. Although physical education (PE) in schools can help kids get up and moving, more and more schools are eliminating PE programs or cutting down the time spent on fitness-building activities. Current guidelines recommend that kids over two years of age should engage in at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity on most, preferably all, days of the week.

People in the same family tend to have similar eating patterns, maintain the same levels of physical activity, and adopt the same attitudes toward being overweight. Studies have shown that a child's risk of obesity greatly increases if one or more parent is overweight or obese. Preventing kids from becoming overweight means adapting the way your family eats and exercises, and how you spend time together. Helping kids lead healthy lifestyles begins with parents who lead by example.

If you're worried that your child or teen may be overweight, please speak with his or her doctor. The doctor can calculate your child's body mass index. This number is compared to a growth chart for children of your kid's age and gender to determine if he or she is in the healthy range.

You may also bring your child to the Healthy Hearts for Kids Group being offered at St. John's Episcopal Hospital. The meetings have a pediatrician and nutritionist on hand to assess your child's eating and activity habits

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and make suggestions on how to make positive changes for the whole family. Healthy Hearts for Kids
meets monthly. For more information on Healthy Hearts for Kids please call 718-869-8400. To make an
appointment with a pediatrician at St. John's Ambulatory Care Center please call 718-869-7690. For
a referral to a physician near you please call St. John's Physician Referral Line at 1-877-SJEH-DOC
(1-877-753-4362).

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