



SLIM YOUR KIDS!

Discover Effective Ways to Help Your Overweight Child Shed Those Pounds – and Keep Them Off **FOREVER** – Regardless of their age or fitness level

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Table of Contents

<i>Introduction</i>	3
<i>Chapter 1: Childhood Obesity - The Facts</i>	5
-How is Childhood Obesity Defined?	5
-The Risks to Your Child.....	7
-Why is Childhood Obesity Increasing?	8
-Looking Beyond Obesity.....	11
<i>Chapter 2: What Can Parents Do to Help?</i>	16
-It's All about Attitude.....	16
-Getting Children to Help Themselves.....	20
-Setting Weight Loss Goals.....	24
-Lead by Example.....	28
-Talking to Your Child.....	32
<i>Chapter 3: Establishing Routine Healthy Eating</i>	36
-Dieting v.s Healthy Eating.....	37
-The Child who is Always Hungry.....	38
-Tips for Better Eating Habits.....	39
-Hungry Toddlers.....	42
-Young Children: The Picky Eaters.....	45
-Teenagers.....	48
<i>Chapter 4: Getting Fit the Fun Way</i>	52
-Tips for Getting Kids Active.....	54
-Tubby Toddlers.....	60
-Young Children.....	63
-A Word about Pre-teens.....	66
-Body Conscious Teenagers.....	69
<i>Chapter 5: Maintaining a Healthy Weight</i>	72
<i>Conclusion</i>	75
<i>Disclaimer</i>	77
<i>Resources</i>	78

Introduction

According to health experts obesity is the number one health issue facing young people today. It is estimated that our children will be the first generation likely to die at a younger age than their parents. Obesity in children has risen dramatically and reached epidemic proportions in the last two decades. Even children who are not yet classed as “obese” are spiraling dangerously close to becoming seriously overweight as modern lifestyles have set a trend for kids to eat to excess and neglect physical activity.

The long list of medical risks to children who are carrying excess weight is severe and, unless something is done about the problem, these risks will continue to plague them well into adulthood. As if that were not worrying enough, overweight children usually have other more immediate concerns which are psychologically damaging and inevitably harm their ability to grow into content, well adjusted adults. In short, obesity is slowly but surely **killing** our kids!

As a parent you have probably already seen some signs the effect being overweight is having on your child.

Has your child ever come home crying because they have been teased or bullied about their weight?

Has your child ever been depressed because he or she just can't physically keep up with their friends?

Does your child ever complain to you that they feel uncomfortable with the way they look or that they hate their body?

If you answered “yes” to any or all of these questions then you owe it to your child to address their weight issues **today!** The odds are already stacked against your child...but there is a solution.

Like many parents of overweight children you probably recognize that the problem needs to be dealt with but just do not know how to go about this in a practical way. It's not your fault – childhood obesity can give rise to many complex issues. It can be especially

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difficult if your child shows no interest in wanting to improve their level of fitness and their general well-being. Do you just have no idea how to motivate your kids to get on the right track? Have your attempts to get them to lose weight always failed because they can't stay away from junk food and they would rather play computer games than do exercise? Does your child feel that losing weight is hopeless and you cannot convince them otherwise? Are you thinking **YOU JUST DON'T KNOW HOW THINGS GOT THIS FAR?**

It doesn't have to be that way!

Fighting obesity in children requires long term effort but this does not mean that the task cannot be a positive one. The information and tips in this book will show you simple ways which you can easily incorporate into your child's daily routine – whether they are a toddler or a teenager - to help your child:

- lose weight;**
- get fit;**
- have more energy;**
- gain confidence;**
- feel great; and**
- keep the weight off!**



What's more, it will reveal how you can get your child to *want* to implement the changes that they will benefit from by living healthier, happier and more fulfilling lives.

As a parent of an overweight child you are not alone. This book will guide you on everything from what you can personally do to help your child to how to talk to your child about the sensitive issues associated with obesity and weight loss. It even provides advice on what to look for to spot any difficulties that your child may be experiencing that you might not be aware of! *Quite simply, by reading and implementing the information in this book you can realistically help your child achieve the weight they deserve to be and add literally years to their life.*

Chapter 1: Childhood Obesity – The Facts

"Obesity constitutes one of the most important medical and public health problems of our time"- Prof. Philip James, Chairman of the International Obesity Taskforce

How is Childhood Obesity Defined?

Parents are usually very quick to notice when a child is sick or has a medical condition, yet when it comes to childhood obesity, parents often ignore the warning signs. This may be because they don't view being overweight as a medical condition. However, childhood obesity is an important issue because not only does it raise immediate concerns for the well-being of young people but it can also give rise to drastic problems in later life.

Adults have a tendency to dismiss children who are overweight as simply having so-called baby fat. But is there such a thing? Where do you draw the line between baby fat, which a child will grow out of, and regular problem fat which is a result of childhood obesity and which is there to stay?

Experts are divided on whether there truly is such a thing as baby fat. Some studies have shown that kids who were overweight at a very young age were still overweight by the time they reached their late teens. But those studies are not necessarily conclusive: many people, who were overweight throughout their school years, went on to lose weight in their early twenties which would suggest they grew out of the excess fat.

So what is the difference between baby fat (if there is such a thing) and just plain fat? The body mass index, or BMI, can give you some insight. BMI is a simple index of weight-for-height that is commonly used in classifying excess weight and obesity in individuals. It is defined as the weight in kilograms divided by the square of the height in meters (kg/m^2). A person with a BMI of between 25 -30 is regarded as *overweight*. Someone with a BMI of 30 or higher is classified as *obese*. Even allowing that some of the excess weight will drop off by itself when the child hits a growth spurt, a BMI of 30 or more indicates that there is some fat there that needs to be dealt with. The BMI system is not

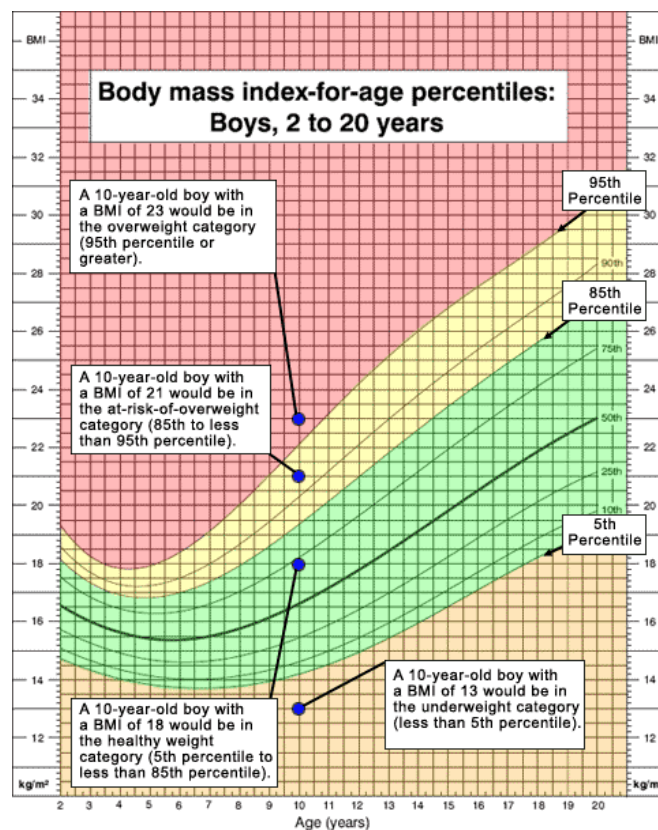
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perfect though. Some people truly are *big-boned* or carry more muscle rather than fat. People who are particularly muscular may technically be deemed overweight even though they have very little body fat. The BMI goes simply by weight, after all, not by the kind of weight it is. It fails to account for varying frame size, muscularity, bone density, cartilage, and water weight. Obesity is not simply a measure of weight. It means that a person has too much fat for his or her specific muscle and bone structure.

For children and teens, BMI is age and sex specific and is often referred to as BMI-for-age. Once a child's BMI has been calculated it is then compared to typical values for other children of the same age, by plotting the BMI number on a BMI-for-age growth chart (for either girls or boys) to obtain a percentile ranking, in order to account for differences in growth rates and amounts of body fat as children mature. Instead of set thresholds for underweight and overweight, then, the BMI percentile allows comparison with children of the same sex and age. A BMI that is less than the 5th percentile is considered underweight and above the 95th percentile is considered overweight. Children with a BMI between the 85th

and 95th percentile are considered to be at risk of becoming overweight. The ideal weight for a child to be is at around the 50th percentile.

Here is an example of how a BMI-for-age growth chart should be interpreted (right):



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You can calculate your own child's BMI and BMI percentile here:

http://kidshealth.org/parent/nutrition_fit/nutrition/bmi_charts.html

If your child's BMI indicates that they are *seriously* overweight you should probably look into a weight loss and exercise program and you should always consult your doctor for advice as your child's weight may be an indication of a medical problem. If your child's score falls into the overweight category much will depend on the age of the child. If your child is very young, such as under the age of 10, the extra weight could simply be what is considered to be baby fat and therefore nothing to be overly concerned about as children grow at different rates and this weight may drop off as your child begins to mature but keep in mind that it could be indicative of a more serious problem.

Certainly though, by the time children reach adolescence, at about age 12 or 13, the baby fat ought to be coming off. If your child is maintaining their weight or more worryingly, is increasing in weight, it's time to stop assuming it is baby fat. As studies have shown, fat 12-year-olds tend to be fat 17-year-olds, and overweight adolescents have a 70 percent chance of becoming overweight or obese adults.

The Risks to Your Child

Medical Problems

Overweight children can face serious problems. This is a health issue and not about appearance. Children are now facing chronic health problems that shouldn't occur for years or decades. Young people are at a higher risk of developing Type 2 diabetes (which used to only be diagnosed in adults) and high blood pressure if they are carrying excess weight. They are also prone to suffer from asthma, sleep apnea, aching joints, constipation and fungal infections, the most common of which is caused by yeast-like fungi called *Candida* which causes redness and inflammation in the skin folds, under the

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breasts, in the genital areas and the buttocks and is highly uncomfortable. If they remain overweight as they grow up, which is highly likely if they are living an unhealthy lifestyle, they put themselves at serious risk for strokes, osteoarthritis, breathing disorders, incurable liver disease and at an increased risk of potentially fatal conditions such as heart attacks and colon and other cancers.

'At least 2.6 million people each year die as a result of being overweight or obese' - World Health Organisation

Psychological Problems

The medical risks aside, childhood obesity can also lead to emotional and psychological problems. These social reasons for losing weight can be just as compelling as the medical ones. Children are particularly susceptible to teasing or bullying from their peers about their weight. While adults tend to discriminate against obese people less overtly, kids will taunt each other openly and cruelly. This can dramatically affect a child's self-esteem, academic performance, and personality and can even lead to depression and, at worst, thoughts of suicide. Many overweight kids often don't have a lot of friends among their peers. They can become shy and withdrawn — or, the opposite, overly goofy and attention seeking, desperate to earn praise, all of which are indicators that they are not comfortable within themselves.

Why is Childhood Obesity Increasing?

It is estimated that over 150 million children worldwide are overweight or obese. With the adverse consequences associated with obesity expected to increase dramatically obesity is now a more important global health issue than mal-nutrition. Excess body weight is the most common childhood disorder in North America and in Europe and is rapidly becoming a major concern in other regions of the world, such as in Asian countries where traditionally weight problems were not an issue amongst the widespread



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population (studies suggest that Asian children who are mostly subsisting on Western-based fast food rather than traditional Asian cooking are most affected). Surprisingly, researchers from the World Health Organization discovered that even in Africa, a continent which tends to be associated with famine and starvation, childhood obesity is becoming a big problem, so much so that double the number of children there suffers from being overweight as opposed to suffering from malnutrition because they are being overfed innutritious food.

The rise in childhood obesity in recent years is the result of several factors, which are not yet fully understood. An individual's genetics, culture and lifestyle all have a role to play. For this reason, it is important not to concentrate on one cause or solution but to deal with all of the issues linked to childhood obesity.

Any factors that cause energy intake to be greater than the energy expended can lead to obesity. However, although other factors may have a part to play the main cause of obesity in children is due to them eating too much and being generally inactive.

Inactivity

The societal reasons for this are numerous. Lifestyles have changed greatly in the past three decades. Physical activity is not as prevalent in the daily lives of children as it used to be. Thirty years ago, more children walked to school and played outdoors than do now, and most of their entertainment options, apart from television, involved some level of physical activity. Today, kids have not just the television, with an ever increasing number of channels to watch, for entertainment but also computers and video games. The result is a generation of children who are turning to visual media for the stimulation that earlier generations derived from physical activities such as sports or outdoor games.

In addition, where schools once had mandatory physical education requirements, today most of those requirements have been relaxed. Only about 29 percent of high school students in North America attend a P.E. class daily today, compared to 42 percent just a decade ago. This has resulted in a generation of children who have to make a conscious

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effort to be physically active and, unless they actually think about it, many can go an entire day without being physically active at all.

Eating Habits

The other major problem is the change in attitude towards food. The pace of life has changed significantly and this has had an impact on the food we eat. People are under more stress and seem to have less time than ever before. This has led to a decrease in the cooking of nutritious home cooked food and an increased reliance on fast food and microwave meals. These types of foods contain excessive amounts of fat, sugar, salt and refined carbohydrates, all of which are contributory factors of weight gain.

This problem is not just confined to the home. Kids have also become used to the super-sized portions and sugar laden soft drinks that have become the norm in fast food restaurants and despite some attempt in recent years to correct the problem there is still a prevalence of processed and other unhealthy foods available to children at school.

For children who have been accustomed to these eating habits the problem will escalate as they get older and become more aware of the large scale media advertising promoting junk food and as they are able to access food other than that which is made available to them by their parents.

Genetics

Although genetics can sometimes have a part to play, it should not be assumed that a child's obesity is caused by a genetic condition. Less than 1 in 100 obese people have a medical cause. Although children are more likely to become obese if one or both of their parents suffer from obesity (which may partly be due to learning bad eating habits from overeating parents), genetic factors are not the full explanation. The changes in society in general have been too rapid. However, some people do inherit a tendency that makes them prone to overeat. Therefore, for some people *part* of the problem is genetic.

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It is not fully understood how this genetic factor works. It has something to do with the control of appetite. When we eat, certain hormones and brain chemicals send messages to the hypothalamus, which is the part of the brain which controls appetite, to say that we have had enough, and to stop eating. The hypothalamus coordinates appetite control with energy utilization and is therefore responsible for maintenance of body weight. Sensory inputs such as taste and smell indicate to the hypothalamus when we are hungry. In some people, this control of appetite and the feeling of fullness may be faulty, or not as good as it is in others. This means that a problem with a person's hypothalamus could result in the development of an eating disorder or an inability to control body weight as a problem with that part of the brain can lead to an imbalance of energy intake and expenditure, resulting in excess weight and obesity.

If a person does inherit a tendency to overeat, it is not inevitable that that person will become overweight or obese. Although such people are likely to struggle more than others to prevent or overcome weight gain, learning about the power of appetite and ways to resist it, being strict about what you eat, and doing some regular physical activity can most certainly help towards combating obesity. With regard to children it is vital that these efforts are put into practice from an early age as research has shown that people who are overweight throughout childhood are very likely to be overweight adults who will have a very difficult time losing weight - only a small percentage of them will then be able to successfully lose weight and maintain weight loss in the long run.

Looking Beyond Obesity

As with any problem a lasting solution to your child's weight problem can only be found once the root cause of the problem has been identified. It may be that it is simply poor lifestyle choices with regard to diet and exercise that have resulted in your child becoming overweight. However, childhood obesity can also be an indicator that there are other issues which need to be resolved.

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Children and young people are under more stress nowadays than ever before. For many children home life can be stressful. Family dynamics have changed significantly in the past few decades and it is now not unusual for children to have to cope with family conflict, separation, divorce, or integration into a step-family. Some may even have to deal with violence in their homes or communities. Schools can also be stressful environments for children. They may worry about homework, their grades, bullying or constant changes in schools. It is also important for parents to remember that children, unlike adults, can become very susceptible to peer pressure and this can add to their worries.

Stress can be particularly acute for teenagers as young adults have specific kinds of stress to deal with. As well as the concerns that younger children may have, teenagers may also be worried about making the right choices with regard to post high school education, exams, finding a job, not having enough money to socialise with friends or being pressured to experiment with alcohol, drugs or sex. Many teenagers often feel frustrated by the fact that they are confined by the rules of living at home but they are not yet of an age that they can live on their own even if *they* feel they are old enough to.

Dealing with stress is problematic for adults and children alike but young people do not have the ability to deal with stress as effectively as adults and children can often turn to food in the form of comfort eating as a way of dealing with pressures that they cannot control. This can lead to the development of a compulsive eating disorder, which is the most common childhood eating disorder. It is thought that an imbalance in serotonin hormone could also be a factor in the cause of eating disorders. An imbalance in serotonin can lead to depression which is often linked with eating disorders.

Some of the feelings which may cue comfort eating are:

Anger

Whether children feel angry at themselves, another person or because of a particular situation which has arisen, it may feel easier for them to stifle their feelings about the problem using food instead of confronting the issue.

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Hopelessness

If children think that there is nothing that they can do about their weight they may take the attitude that they may as well continue to overeat because they cannot change the situation for the better. They may take the attitude that by continuing to eat they are at least getting some pleasure from food.

Lack of Control

Overeating can be linked to a feeling of lack of control. If it seems to a person that everything else in their life is beyond control food becomes the focus of something which that person can be in charge of. Children are likely to be particularly susceptible to these feelings because their lives are ruled by other people to a large extent, such as by their parents, teachers and other authority figures.

Feeling Unappreciated

Even if they don't always make it obvious, especially in their teenage years when children are generally less communicative, children do seek recognition. If children have accomplished something which they feel proud of and no one has noticed then they may find themselves more tempted to congratulate themselves by bingeing on their favorite foods.

Boredom

This is a common reason for eating, despite not being hungry, for adults and children alike. If a child feels bored, or perhaps even lonely, bingeing on food is an easy way to occupy their time and make them feel a bit better.

Binge eating can be identified by the following behaviours:

- Eating large amounts of food when not physically hungry (for example continuing to eat even after having a meal)
- Eating to the point of being uncomfortably full
- Eating much more quickly than is normal
- Being plagued by feelings of guilt and/or depression after consuming a large amount of food

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- Not eating in the company of others in order to conceal the amount of food being consumed
- Bingeing on food regularly and not just from time to time
- Feeling out of control during a comfort binge
- An increasingly irregular eating pattern e.g. skipping meals, eating at unusual times such as late at night, eating lots of junk food

Many children are who are unhappy about their weight struggle with the feelings which cue excessive eating because they don't realize there may be something they can do about it. If your child is unhappy because of their weight this is just as important a reason for addressing this issue as any health concern.

Look for signs that your child is unhappy at school, or unhappy with his or her physical appearance. Very young children may not be able to tell you that they are stressed, but signs of this can be identified by the way they behave and from physical symptoms. For example, toddlers and preschool children demonstrate feelings of stress by clinging to a parent, crying more than usual, having temper tantrums and displaying regressive behaviours.

Children of school age are more able to tell you that they are feeling stressed. They may verbalise their feelings and they may also manifest physical complaints, such as stomach aches, headaches, stuttering, experiencing sleeping problems or needing the toilet more often. Children who are experiencing stress may also display uncharacteristic behaviours. They may begin to lie, bully, defy authority, be aggressive or irritable, engage in disruptive behaviour, refuse to go to school, and start bringing home poor school results. They can also have panic attacks, withdraw, whine, be depressed, lose interest in usual activities, appear worried, lack concentration, cry, appear to be lazy, be accident prone, or have less contact with friends.

Pre-adolescents and adolescents, though the most able to communicate of all ages of children, are the most likely to refuse to talk about their problem or deny any problem exists. While stressed, teenagers may behave in many of the ways that younger children

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behave when they are dealing with stress. However, regressive behavior will take a different form and will likely manifest as not being willing to take on more adult responsibilities and wanting to play more. They may show a lack of interest when discussing subjects concerning their transition into adult life, such as plans for college and career plans.

If you suspect that your child is experiencing emotional difficulties or may have a problem with binge eating then you must seek advice from your doctor and ask to be referred to a qualified mental health professional with experience of treating children.

This all makes very bleak reading, but the fact is that overweight children face a daunting future.

The complex issues relating to childhood obesity mean that the solution is not as simple as most people think. Even doctors can be guilty of oversimplifying the problem. “*Put them on a diet. Make them exercise. No more fast food. Stop giving snacks. No soda.*” How often have you heard that?



It may sound easy but as any parent of an overweight child knows it is not realistic. That isn't the whole picture. Making the changes that are required to combat childhood obesity isn't easy and they are even harder to stick to. But once you truly understand the obesity problem you can start to turn things around.

Of course diet and exercise are important factors in the fight against childhood obesity but there is another vital factor about which parents must educate themselves which is crucial for success - behavior modification. By learning to modify the habits that led your child to become overweight *in a way that changes can be sustained*, you will be able to help him or her lose that excess weight and maintain a healthy weight for life. Your child's future can be revolutionized for the better. As bad as things may seem right now there is hope – and it lies with you...

**** End of Preview****