

OBESITY: IT'S NO LONGER JUST AN ADULT PROBLEM

Childhood obesity rates continue to grow in the U.S. which could lead to the first generation in history to have a shorter average lifespan than the previous generation.



Kids today have no shortage of downtime distractions, such as cell phones, video games, cable television and the internet. Factor in our fascination with fast food and diminishing desire to exercise, and you have the perfect formula for an expanding waistline among America's youth.

Statistics show the obesity rate among children ages 6 to 11 has more than doubled in the past 20 years, increasing from 6.5 percent in 1980 to 17 percent in 2006. Adolescent rates are even higher. Obesity among young people ages 12 to 19 rose from 5 percent to almost 18 percent during the same period, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.



Vicki Hardy, D.O.

groups, including Native Americans, Hispanics, Asians and African Americans, are predisposed to the disease.

Obese children also face increased risk of hypertension, heart disease and stroke as they grow older. As a result, more children and adolescents are being prescribed traditionally adult medications for high blood pressure, abnormal cholesterol and diabetes.

The consequences of childhood obesity aren't just physical either. Obese children often have poor self-esteem and increased stress due to peer pressure and trying to make the right healthy lifestyle choices.

The solution to childhood obesity starts with eating healthier foods and increasing physical activity. Dr. Hardy counsels parents of all her young patients about what to eat, starting with newborns. If

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As a Family Physician at Hoke Family Medical Center in Raeford, Vicki Hardy, D.O., sees the burgeoning problem on a daily basis. She says kids are just following in their parents' footsteps because many of them are also obese.

"Kids were markedly thinner when I was growing up," Dr. Hardy says. "Today, it doesn't surprise me to see a patient who is obese as young as 2 to 4 years old."

Obesity means having too much body fat. It is different from being overweight, which means weighing too much. Both conditions, however, mean the person's weight is greater than what is normally considered a healthy weight.

There are many repercussions related to childhood obesity. The most glaring is the rise of Type 2 diabetes. Once known as "adult-onset diabetes," the disease is becoming more prevalent in children. If left untreated, Type 2 diabetes can lead to a host of other problems later in life, including kidney disease, neuropathy (nerve damage), blindness, circulatory problems, increase infection and early death.

Typical symptoms of Type 2 diabetes include fatigue, nausea, frequent urination, excessive thirst, weight loss, blurred vision, slow-healing wounds and infections, and constant hunger. The risk factors include family history and ethnicity. Certain racial

a patient is obese, she will often send the family to a dietitian for dietary help and write out a prescription for minimum daily exercise requirements. She also encourages parents to enroll children in exercise or sports programs, such as those offered through the Parks and Recreation Department or the YMCA.

The key to childhood weight loss, she says, is lifestyle modification. This includes actively involving parents in their children's weight loss efforts by setting realistic goals and celebrating properly. That means rewarding kids with praise and healthy fruits and vegetables instead of sugary snacks. It also means turning off the TV and spending more time outside so the family doesn't waste away on the couch.

"The younger you start with children, the better," Dr. Hardy says. "If we don't turn things around, this could be the first generation in history where parents out live their children."



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