

HEALTH NEWS FROM THE DCF MEDICAL TEAM



OBESITY

What is Obesity?

Obesity is generally defined as more than 20 percent above ideal weight for a particular height and age. It occurs when excess body fat accumulates, increasing the risk for multiple health problems that can reduce life expectancy. Various factors influence the likelihood of becoming obese.

How is obesity diagnosed?

Obesity is determined by calculating a person's body mass index (BMI), which is the percentage of body fat in relation to height and weight. Primary care clinicians start monitoring BMI after a child turns 2 years old.

What is the impact of obesity on health?

Obesity increases the risk for diseases such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, heart disease, diabetes, polycystic ovarian syndrome, menstrual disorders, gastro-esophageal reflux, gallbladder stones, strokes, migraines, sleep apnea, asthma, poor mobility, joint and muscle pains, and arthritis. Psychosocial issues associated with obesity can include depression, social stigmatization, negative body image, low self esteem, negative stereotyping, teasing, and bullying.

What contributes to developing obesity?

- ❖ Obesity is usually the result of consuming more calories than the body uses or needs. The number of calories a person needs depends on age, sex, physical activity level, and metabolic rate (rate at which the body burns calories).
- ❖ Physical inactivity is one of the most common causes of obesity because sedentary lifestyles require fewer calories. In current society, people often consume large amounts of calories without increasing physical activity.
- ❖ Some studies have shown that genetics may play a role for a small proportion of the population.
- ❖ Socioeconomics can influence the development of obesity. Produce and healthy foods are often higher priced or more difficult to purchase in neighborhoods where grocery stores aren't easily accessible.
- ❖ Sugary drinks regularly or in large quantities can lead to obesity. This includes soda, energy drinks, juices, and alcohol.
- ❖ Some medications can contribute to obesity, such as insulin, antidepressants, antipsychotics, steroids, hormonal contraceptives and some seizure medications.

What can be done to prevent obesity?

Evaluate the home environment and the parenting role within the environment in the following areas:

- ❖ Does the family mostly eat well-balanced meals? During a typical week, how many well-balanced meals are prepared in the home?
- ❖ How many times a week does the family eat fast-food?
- ❖ Do other family members (for example, parents, and children) contribute to the decisions on what food is purchased?
- ❖ Does the overweight child and/or family use food as a reward, for comfort, or to relieve boredom?
- ❖ Is the child physically active every day? How many hours a day does the child spend watching TV or on the computer?
- ❖ How many TVs and computers are in the house? Does the child have a TV or a computer in his or her bedroom?

How can you manage obesity?

The best way to address obesity is through a healthy diet and consistent physical activity. One way to identify unhealthy eating triggers is for an overweight child to keep a journal with foods eaten, where eaten, the time of day, and the reasons for eating. If a child is in day care, an after-school program or eats at the school cafeteria, find out what the food choices are there. For adolescents, there are also programs such as weight loss summer camps, peer support groups, and medically supervised, multidisciplinary programs. Weight loss requires a lifestyle change and not a quick fix with fad diets and quick weight loss products. If a child or youth is severely obese despite a healthy diet and exercise, a physician may recommend surgery. However, surgery should be considered a last resort. The Department of Public Health's Mass in Motion programs has more information on resources and management; this information can be obtained by going to www.mass.gov/massinmotion.

References: www.aap.org/obesity; Lippincott Williams & Wilkins "Nurse's 5-minute clinical consult 548-549; Merck Manual of medical information, 2nd edition, 914-920; www.wikipedia.org/obesity; www.healthychild.org