

The Influences of Childhood Obesity

Over the past four decades, the rise in childhood obesity has significantly impacted many children, adolescents, and adults. The Centers for Disease Control states that 1 in every 5 children in the United States has obesity. Children with obesity are at a higher risk for developing chronic health conditions, such as asthma, joint and bone complications, sleep apnea, and type 2 diabetes. They are also at a higher risk for developing heart disease, due to potential high blood pressure and high cholesterol. Children with obesity are more likely to be obese as adults which increases the risk Type 2 Diabetes and heart disease, as well and many types of cancers.

There are many factors that have a major influence on obesity in children. Eating behaviors, lack of physical activity, metabolism and family genetics are the most individualized factors; however, home environment and social factors play a huge role. Research shows that one of the most influential risk factors is screen time. Too much time spent being inactive while watching television, scrolling social media or playing video games may also lead to lack of sleep for some children, which is also a risk factor for obesity. There is a cycle of events that all lead to the development of obesity. Over the years there has been a trend of inactivity and easy accessibility to inexpensive, high calorie foods and empty calorie beverages.

How can we help support the healthy growth and development that children need to become healthy adults? Elaine Montemayor-Gonzalez an Extension Health Specialist with Texas &M AgriLife Extension says the most important thing we can do as adults is to be a healthy role model for your family. She also recommends that we make health a priority and care about the quality of the food that your family eats, and how much activity they get is really the first step. Seek out help and resources so that you feel supported when making changes for yourself and your family". Try making some of the following changes and look at these helpful resources from Texas A&M AgriLife Extension.

- **Physical Activity** – School-aged youth are recommended to achieve a minimum of 60 minutes or more of physical activity throughout the day. Make a family activity calendar at home and motivate each other to be active together. Enjoy the outdoors and take a walk, ride bikes, build a garden, practice stretching, or play a basketball game in your driveway. Engage in a friendly competition with other families and see who can “Walk Across Texas” first. For more information on a free 8-week physical activity program, visit <http://walkacrosstexas.tamu.edu/>
- **Healthy Nutrition**- Always plan out your meals before grocery shopping to limit the temptations of unhealthy foods. Choose more fruit and vegetables as snacks throughout the day and make them half of your plate for meals. Drink plenty of water to avoid dehydration and limit sugary beverages. Invite your children to help you prepare and cook a meal, not only is this fun for them, but they are learning about

healthy foods. To try some quick and healthy recipes, visit <https://dinnertonight.tamu.edu>

- **Screen Time-** Boundaries for screen time and social media should always be followed daily. A good balance will help limit inactivity. It is recommended that children 6 years and older should limit their screen time from 1- 2 hours a day. Set automatic limits on phones and tablets, and motivate your child to engage in youth development programs such as 4-H. To learn more about the hands-on activities in science, health, and agriculture, visit: <https://texas4-h.tamu.edu/>

As parents, grandparents, and guardians we must make positive changes for our children. We are the most important influencers in their lives. The positive change for a healthy lifestyle must come from us.

Sources:

<https://www.cdc.gov/features/childhoodobesity/index.html>

<https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/138/5/e20162593>

https://health.gov/paguidelines/second-edition/pdf/Physical_Activity_Guidelines_2nd_edition.pdf#page=46

<https://www.aap.org/en-us/about-the-aap/aap-press-room/Pages/American-Academy-of-Pediatrics-Announces-New-Recommendations-for-Childrens-Media-Use.aspx>