



Overweight Kids

what communities can do

Risks of being overweight

! Overweight in children creates numerous, immediate, and in some cases life-threatening health effects, both physical and psychological.

♥ Overweight children are 43.5 times more likely to have at least three cardiovascular risk factors.

(Journal of the American College of Nutrition 2001; 20(6):599-608)

Health effects of overweight include:

- High blood pressure
- Type 2 diabetes
- Heart disease
- Stroke
- Some cancers
- Arthritis
- Low self-esteem
- Negative body image
- Discrimination
- Teasing
- Depression
- Poor academics

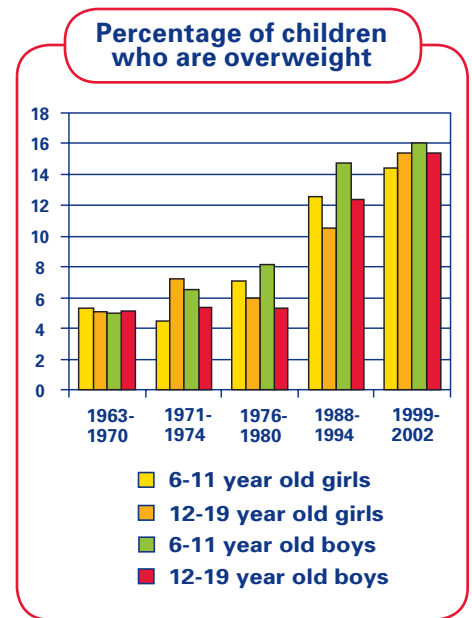
→ See description of a health-promoting community on page 3

The prevalence of overweight among American youth has become an epidemic. The number of overweight children (ages 6-11) has almost quadrupled in the past four decades and for adolescents (12-19) has tripled. In only 12 years the prevalence of overweight among children increased 5 percent depending on the age group. For African-American and Mexican-American adolescents there has been an increase of 10 percent in this short time period.

Understanding the terminology

Several terms are used to describe the growing girth of our society. Some are specific to adults; others are specific to children. When referring to weight concerns among children, the two terms acknowledged by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) are “at-risk for overweight” and “overweight.” Both describe a child’s weight relative to the growth charts based on BMI (body mass index). The growth charts, which are based on BMI for age, were released in 2000 and can be found at the Centers for Disease Control Web site (see page 4).

However, before classifying a child in either category it is vital to remember that children normally



experience growth spurts throughout childhood and adolescence. A child cannot be diagnosed at-risk-for-overweight or overweight based on just one BMI measurement. It is more useful to monitor a child’s growth pattern and BMI over time. Children whose weight falls at or above the 85th percentile on a consistent basis are considered “at risk of overweight.” Children whose weight falls at or above the 95th percentile on a consistent basis are considered “overweight.” Some children experiencing growth spurts may fall above these percentiles at certain points in time, but not on a consistent basis.



Why do children become overweight?

Childhood overweight is related to a number of factors including poor diet, sedentary lifestyle, genetics, and community environment.



Diet

Hundreds of new food products are introduced every year. The food industry spends \$12 billion annually marketing towards children. The availability of sugar-free, fat-free, and low-calorie food products in addition to fresh fruits and vegetables has increased substantially in the past several decades; however, the increase in overweight has outpaced this growth.



Physical activity

Over the past century, the introduction of many labor-saving devices has changed our daily environment. Nearly half of our young people do not get vigorous physical activity on a daily basis. The following table represents percentage of youth ages 12 to 21 who report no participation in moderate or vigorous activity during the past 7 days.

Television viewing is replacing much of the time children used previously for physical activity. Currently the average 2- to 7- and 8- to 18-year old spends 2.5 and 4.5 hours per day respectively watching TV. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends no more than 2 hours of screen time, including TV, computer, and video games, per day.

(Kids and Media @ the New Millenium: A Kaiser Family Foundation Report 1999)

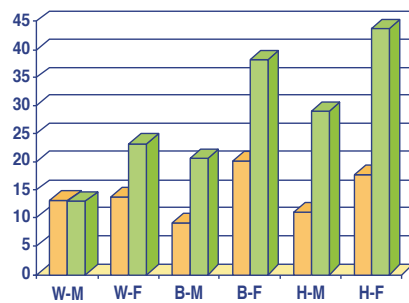
Community Environment

A growing problem in many communities is a lack of sidewalks, parks, biking trails, and community-sponsored recreation. Access to community gardens, farmers' markets, and healthy vending or concession options also is limited. Urban sprawl—including planned communities, superhighways, and super-shopping centers—has contributed to this problem. Communities can benefit by examining their infrastructures and working to provide a safe environment that promotes physical activity and access to healthy food options.

Genetics

More than 250 genes affect body weight. Human beings with a genetic disposition to storing body fat had an evolutionary advantage—they were able to survive times of famine and food shortages. Yet, it takes generations of evolution for a genetic adaptation to be expressed. Our genes haven't changed over the past several decades to account for the increase in overweight and obesity.

Percentage of youth ages 12 to 21 who report no participation in moderate or vigorous activity during the past 7 days



■ National Health Survey, 1992
■ Youth Risk Behavior, 1995

W-M = white male
W-F = white female
B-M = black male
B-F = black female
H-M = Hispanic male
H-F = Hispanic female

What does a health-promoting community look like?

- Sidewalks and bike paths
- Accessible and safe parks
- Variety of sponsored activities at convenient times for all ages
- Neighborhood (and school) gardens
- Farmers' markets
- Healthy vending/concession options
- Adults who model and promote healthy eating and exercising habits
- Accessible and safe school play equipment
- Comprehensive health programs
- Daily physical education for all students
- Breakfast and lunch programs serve a variety of tasty, nutritious, fresh food
- Adults who model and promote healthy eating and exercising habits
- Children and adults who eat five servings of fruits and vegetables every day
- Children and adults who are physically active 60 and 30 min/day respectively
- No one spends more than 2 hours a day watching TV, playing video games, or using the computer for recreation
- Everyone has regular check-ups and care from a health care professional

Creating a health-promoting community

Communities need to build partnerships among schools, families, community groups, and individuals. This facilitates coordination of resources and expertise to promote healthy development of children, youth, and their families.

Community Capacity = Resources



Potential community partners include:

- Health professionals, teachers, parks and recreation, school administrators, parents, after school programs, youth programs
- Nutrition services (RDs, WIC, food stamps, farmers' markets)
- Recreation programs
- Health/counseling services, hospitals, clinics, health care providers
- Childcare and preschools
- Schools and related resources
- Spiritual/religious services and organizations
- Transportation
- Clubs and organizations
- Resources for underserved groups
- Media
- Cooperative Extension Services

One of the first steps of the community partnership is to conduct an assessment of the community. This will help the community if there are areas of concern that need to be prioritized or targeted. Identifying a common goal also will make the partnership more efficient and effective.

You can help create a health-promoting environment

1 What changes would you like to see in your school or community?

2 Which changes are you willing to devote time and energy toward accomplishing?

3 Who could help you work toward making these changes?

4 How can you encourage others to help?



Check these Resources

Assessment and Planning Tools

Centers for Disease Control

School Health Index
www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dash/SHI/index.htm

BMI for age growth charts
www.cdc.gov/nchs/about/major/nhanes/growthcharts/clinical_charts.htm#Clin_1

Healthy People 2010 Toolkit
www.healthypeople.gov/state/toolkit/default.htm

Iowa Community Health Needs Assessment and Health Improvement
www.idph.state.ia.us/chnahip

Mobilizing for Action through Planning and Partnerships (MAPP)
<http://mapp.naccho.org>

Moving to the Future: Developing Community-Based Nutrition Services Assessment and Planning Tools
www.movingtothefuture.org

North Carolina Community Health Assessment
www.healthycarolinians.org

Planned Approach to Community Health (PATCH):
www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/patch/

United State Department of Agriculture Team Nutrition—Changing the Scene
www.fns.usda.gov/tn/Resources/index.htm

General Information

Iowa State University Extension

Children and Weight—What communities can do.
Video tape and meeting/planning guide available by loan from Iowa State University Extension
litch@iastate.edu
(515) 294-9484

Extension to Communities
www.extension.iastate.edu/communities/

Extension Publications
www.extension.iastate.edu/pubs/

Food and Nutrition Extension
www.extension.iastate.edu/nutrition

Lighten Up Iowa
www.lightenupiowa.org

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