

Childhood Obesity

Condition

In children we use growth charts and body mass index (BMI), which is a ratio of height to weight to categorize children as underweight, healthy and overweight.

- **Overweight** = BMI at or above the 85th percentile and below the 95th percentile for children and teens of the same age and sex.
- **Obesity** = BMI above the 95th percentile
- **32% of Canadian children** are considered to be overweight or obese.
- **35.9% of Saskatchewan children** are considered to be overweight or obese.

Unhealthy weight in childhood is also linked with serious illnesses such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease in adulthood.

Causes

The majority of children above a healthy weight have gained weight through overconsumption of food and a sedentary lifestyle. Weight gain can happen when there is excess energy (food and drinks) being consumed and not enough energy being burned off (physical activity).

Social Factors Contributing to Obesity:

- Increased “screen time” (this includes television, video games, tablets, etc)
- Lack of safe and accessible physical activity options
- Increased advertising of unhealthy foods (high fat, sugar and/or sodium)
- Increased availability to unhealthy foods.
- Increased portion sizes of food
- Limited access to healthy, nutritious and affordable foods
- Increased use of cars and buses for transportation instead of active transport (eg. walking or biking)

It is also important to consider family factors that may influence a child’s weight.

Examples of family or household factors include:

- Family role models
- The food that is available in the home
- The food that is consumed during meal times
- The eating and physical activity habits of the parents
- Safe environments to be active in (neighbourhoods, homes, etc)



Promoting a Healthy Weight

Preventative interventions for childhood obesity are most effective early in life during the years of 0-5 as healthy behaviours and patterns become more established during this time, and will promote the transference of these behaviours into adulthood.



Key Pieces of Prevention

- Healthy eating
 - Increased physical activity
 - Reduced screen time (e.g. TV, tablets, video games, etc)
- Changes in components are most powerful when paired together

Adopting a healthy lifestyle can be facilitated through role modelling and family activities. Health professionals can offer insight on overcoming barriers to healthy living and provide expertise on exercise.

Excess Body Weight Can Cause:

- Increased pressure on the joints
- Increased joint pain
- Increased stress on ligaments
- Decreased muscular strength

Physiotherapists Can Help

Physical therapists can play an important role in:

- Overcoming barriers
- Increasing knowledge of “do’s and don’ts” of exercise
- Education of health promotion and movement
- Decreasing joint swelling and pain
- Increasing strength and providing education on proper exercise techniques and form
- Education on what should and should not be felt during exercise
- Modification of exercise to avoid injury and maximize participation



Making sure children have sufficient exercise is one of the key factors for weight management as well as prevention of secondary diseases while minimizing symptoms of excess body weight such as joint pain and weakness.

