



CHILDHOOD OBESITY

Studies have shown that about 30% of all children in America aged 6 to 19 are either **overweight** or **obese**. That is almost one out of three young Americans. The situation in the countries of the European Union is **similar**.

The **body mass index** (BMI) is a formula to **measure obesity**. It uses a combination of **height** and **weight**. A BMI **score** of 25 or higher shows that you are overweight, and a BMI of over 30 **indicates** obesity.



Who is at risk ?

If you are **gaining weight**, it does not always mean that you are becoming **obese**. Children and young adults need **nutrients** in order to grow, so they gain weight as time goes on. However, if you **consume** more than you need and begin **putting on** extra weight, you may be on the road to obesity - **combined** with all kinds of health problems.

Here are some **signs** that tell you if you are at risk:

- Children who have obese parents or grandparents are in greater danger of becoming obese than others.
- If **diseases** like high **blood pressure**, high cholesterol, **type 2 diabetes** or heart illnesses **run in** your family you might be **at risk** too.
- **Bowed** legs at an early age can be a warning signal for obesity.
- Depression and a **lack of confidence** have also been **connected to** obesity.
- People who don't get enough **exercise** and sit around and do nothing all day long are **definitely** more at risk than others.

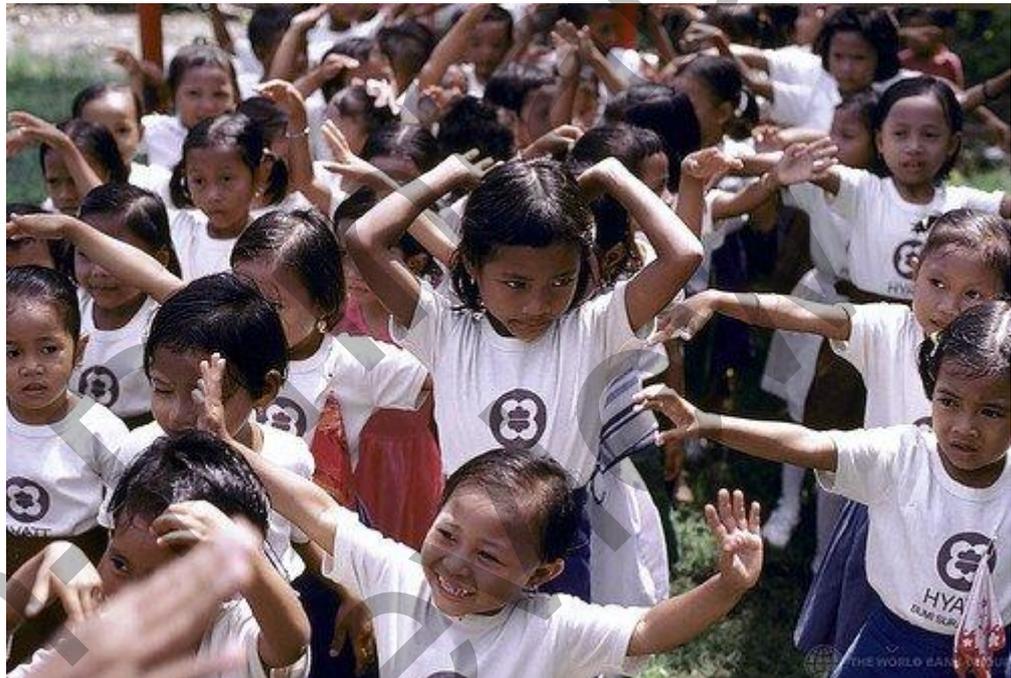
What causes childhood obesity ?

The **explanation** is really simple: if you take in more energy in the form of food than you **use up** you will **gain weight**. There are, however, many **factors** that can **influence** this.



Genes **determine** how your body **stores** food and how well it turns food into energy. Our bodies are built to store energy in **fat cells** for times when food is **scarce**. But not all bodies are the same. Your genes come from your parents, so **overweight** parents are more **likely** to have overweight children.

Although you may have good genes, you still can become obese. One of the main causes of **obesity** is the **lack** of **physical** exercise. An **average** child spends less time **exercising** than children did ten or twenty years ago. Our free time activities have changed. **Instead of** going outside and doing something physical, children sit still for hours in front of computers, TV and video games.



Young children exercising

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Snacks and fast food

Many of us eat up to four meals a day **thanks to excessive** snacking. And when we have a snack, we don't eat a carrot or an apple. Instead, we **reach** for junk food. But this is not always the children's **fault**. Schools are full of **vending machines** that offer high calorie snacks and sugary **soft drinks**. To make things worse, they are **bombarded** with TV **ads** and commercials for unhealthy food. An **average** American eight-year-old watches more than four thousand food ads a year. About 35% of these ads are for candy and snacks, another 10% for fast food.



Fast food is another reason for obesity. While some **fast-food chains** offer healthy alternatives, these aren't what people order. Today's families also **eat out** a lot more than earlier generations.

Eating habits at home

If you **develop** healthy eating habits, you'll be more likely to keep a healthy weight. And it's at home where we form such habits.

If your parents are overweight or obese, chances are that you may have seen wrong **eating habits** your whole life. Children who observe their parents eat a cookie **instead of** a piece of fruit, eat their meals in front of the TV set or eat too quickly are more **likely** to do the same. This **increases** their chances of becoming overweight children and, later on, adults.

What childhood obesity can lead to

Apart from the **need** for larger school desks and airline seats, what else is there to worry about?

- **Type 2 diabetes** was once thought to be a disease that **mainly affected** adults, but this is no longer true. It can lead to **blindness**, heart and **kidney** diseases and damage your nerves.
- **Studies** have shown that **obesity** can cause children with asthma to use more medicine and **wheeze** more.
- Overweight children and **adolescents** are more likely to have high **blood pressure** than children with a normal weight.
- **Sleeping disorders** are among the most **common consequences** of childhood obesity. Some children may even have **pauses** in their breathing during sleep. If not **treated**, it may lead to a **series** of other illnesses, **including** heart and lung problems.

Obesity can lead to high blood pressure

Image: "[Blood pressure measuring. Doctor and patient. Health care.](#)" by [agilemktg1](#) is marked with [Public Domain Mark 1.0](#)

