

Childhood Obesity

I found this article originally on the RX Muscle website and feel it's well worth a read whether or not you have children as I'm sure you know someone who does, so please feel free to copy it and pass it along.

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By John Whyte, MD, MPH Chief Medical Expert

I've heard it time and time again. "Doctor Whyte, I've been fat my whole life and I've only had diabetes for a year, so it can't be related to my weight." Or "My child is big-boned. He'll lose weight once he starts to grow more. There's nothing to worry about." Unfortunately, we have a lot to worry about as we continue to put on the pounds. We're quickly becoming a country of overweight and obese people. Obesity is a real problem in the U.S. because it's making us sick -- literally!

In the late 1970s, only about 15% of American adults aged 20 to 74 and about 5% of kids were obese¹. Today, it's up to about a third of adults and 17% of kids and teens². Another third of folks are overweight. The scary part is that if you are actually at a normal weight, you're part of the minority! That's a big problem. Unfortunately, extra weight brings a whole host of health problems that get worse when we're carrying all those extra pounds . . . and actually get better when we lose weight, supplement correctly and increase our time exercising.

Did you realize that heart disease and type 2 diabetes are directly related to obesity? Your risk of type 2 diabetes goes up dramatically as your weight starts to rise. It's not surprise that diabetes rates have skyrocketed as more and more of us become obese. Right now, about 26 million of us have diabetes --mostly type 2, for which obesity is the biggest risk factor³. We used to think type 2 diabetes was mainly an adult disease, but now we're seeing kids getting type 2 diabetes too.

Unlike most other diseases, type 2 diabetes is largely preventable. That's right -- some people can get it under control by losing weight and starting to get some exercise. And believe me -- it's important to get diabetes under control. Diabetes can lead to heart attacks, amputations, blindness and even kidney failure.

Obesity is a national health problem. Compared to people at healthier weights, if you're obese, you are more likely to have high blood pressure and high cholesterol, both of which raise the risk of heart disease and stroke⁴. If you could look inside your blood vessels, you might even see the difference. Researchers have found that obese young men are more likely to have fatty streaks and plaques in the blood vessels of their hearts. Even kids are at higher risk of high blood pressure and unhealthy cholesterol levels if they're obese -- researchers have seen early signs of heart disease in them.

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But maybe you're tired of hearing about diabetes and heart disease. How about gout? Gout means periodic inflammation of a toe, knee, or other joint. Some people say the joint gets so painful they can't even stand to have a bed sheet touching it. Obesity is also a risk factor for frequent heartburn. Obese person -- adults and kids -- are more likely to develop gallstones, which can cause crampy belly pain. Symptoms can be severe enough to land you in the operating room to have your gallbladder removed.

All that weight is hard on your joints, too, which may help explain why arthritis is more common in people who are obese. In women, obesity can interfere with fertility, make menstrual periods irregular, and even cause you to lose control of your bladder.

Kids have some special obesity-related risks. I already mentioned diabetes. Another one is a bone problem where the top of the thighbone splits across its growth plate due to all the extra weight. Surgery is necessary to put the piece of one back in place. We don't know all the details yet, but obesity might even speed up puberty in girls and slow it down in boys. Obesity is becoming so common in kids that this generation is the first generation whose life expectancy is less than their parents. It's all due to the eventual health problems of obesity. And the reality is that if you're obese as a teenager, you're more than 50% likely to be obese as an adult. Most teenagers do not outgrow their weight.

If all that isn't enough, obesity is also linked to cancer. There are pretty clean connections with esophageal cancer, kidney cancer, colon cancer, uterine cancer, and breast cancer⁵. It looks like obesity might raise the risk of lots of other cancers, too. This doesn't mean you'll definitely get cancer if you're obese, or that you definitely won't if you're skinny. But it's certainly something to think about.

If you're worried that "fighting obesity" means you have to subsist on tofu and lettuce, think again. You don't have to go crazy at the gym or diet down to a size two to combat the health risks of obesity. Losing just a modest amount of weight, by eating right, supplementing appropriately and exercising regularly, can make a difference. Studies have shown that people at high risk of diabetes can use a healthy diet and consistent exercise routine to reduce the chance of developing the disease. Those studies aimed for a 5% to 7% weight loss, which is about 10 to 15 pounds for a 200-pound person⁶.

Losing some weight and getting more exercise can also lower your blood pressure, get your cholesterol under control, and even help treat diabetes if you already have it. How much you need to do will depend on your lifestyle now, your genetic background, and your personal medical history -- but odds are you can make some changes without turning your life upside down. And if you have kids it's important that they see you being healthy so they develop the same habits.

When they released the latest dietary guidelines early last year, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Department of Health & Human Services had some great common-sense suggestions. "Enjoy your food," they said, "but eat less. Avoid oversized portions." They're not saying you can't still have a cookie or a plate of barbecue now and then -- just don't get the giant cookie or the double-portion platter. "Make half your plate fruits and vegetables" is another tip. That's an easy way to make sure you fill up on the good stuff.

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There's always someone who says "My mom was obese and she lived until she was 90, so I don't think I have much to worry about." Honestly, those folks are the exception. Most adults and kids who are obese are going to develop serious health problems, if they don't already have them. The dangers of obesity are real, and it's time to recognize them and do something about it!

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4. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The Surgeon General's Vision for a Healthy and Fit Nation. Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Surgeon General, January 2010. Accessed at <http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/obesityvision/obesityvision2010.pdf>.
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6. Small Steps. Big Rewards. Your GAME PLAN to Prevent Type 2 Diabetes: Information for Patients. National Diabetes Education Program, 2006. <http://ndep.nih.gov/publications/PublicationDetail.aspx?PubId=71>

Always consult your doctor before beginning this or any training or diet/supplement program.