



Preschooler

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND ADIPOSITY

focus

Obesity is a problem that affects many kids, and can often times result in poor health outcomes. Preschool children can prevent unhealthy weight gain by staying active and eating right. Find out how you can help your child lead a healthy lifestyle and develop a healthy body.

Active Preschoolers Gain Less Body Fat

Adiposity, or excess body fat, is a problem that affects both children and adults. When we take in more energy from our diet than we use up throughout the day, our body stores the extra energy as fat. Too much body fat is unhealthy and can cause high blood pressure, diabetes and heart disease. Preschool children who are obese are more likely to be obese as adults. This risk increases as the child gets older, which is why it is important to deal with unhealthy weight gain as early as possible. The Canadian physical activity guidelines suggest that

preschool children get at least 3 hours of total activity time every day. Research shows that children who meet this recommendation have less body fat than those who do not. Also, in a study that followed 3-5 year old children for 8 years, the kids who were most active gained the least amount of body fat. More research is needed to help us better understand how different activity levels affect adiposity in preschool children. Still, regular physical activity has many health benefits and should be encouraged!



Measuring Adiposity: The Body Mass Index

The Body Mass Index (BMI) is just one tool of many that experts use to estimate adiposity levels. Although BMI *does not* measure body fat, it does tell us how healthy a child's weight is for his or her height. Once calculated, BMI is plotted on a growth chart to see how the child compares to a large sample of normally developing children of the same gender and age. The child's weight is then described as being underweight, healthy weight, overweight or obese. To check your child's BMI using an online calculator, visit: www.bcm.edu/bodycomplab/mainbodycomp.htm. **Note:** The BMI calculator is not a diagnostic tool. Any concerns about your child's weight should be discussed with a doctor.



As a parent or caregiver, it is your role to offer your preschooler healthy food choices, but it is the role of your child to decide how much to eat. A child's appetite may vary between meals but trust them to let you know when they are full.

A Guide to Healthy Eating

When it comes to preventing adiposity, physical activity is only one piece of the puzzle. To help your child maintain a healthy weight, daily physical activity should be combined with a nutritious diet.

For healthy growth and development, Canada's Food Guide recommends that 3-5 year old boys and girls get the following daily servings:

- ✓ **5 servings of Vegetables and Fruits**
(4 servings for children 3 years old)
- ✓ **4 servings of Grain Products**
(3 servings for children 3 years old)
- ✓ **2 servings of Milk and Alternatives**
- ✓ **1 serving of Meat and Alternatives**

To create a balanced meal for your child, try and include foods from three of the four food groups. To learn more about serving sizes, and to download a copy of Canada's Food Guide, visit: www.healthcanada.gc.ca/foodguide

Did You Know?



Many fruit drinks are made mostly with sugar and water and have little nutritional value. Real fruit juice has important vitamins and minerals, and ½ cup (125 ml) can count as 1 fruit serving. When buying juice, be sure to read labels carefully and look for 100% fruit juice.

Developing healthy habits will help your child have a healthy body. Make physical activity a habit by making it a regular part of your child's day.



The Child Health & Exercise Medicine Program at McMaster University is working to advance child health through excellence in research.

To learn about our current studies, visit us online at fhs.mcmaster.ca/chemp

Tips to Help Your Child Avoid Unhealthy Weight Gain

Small changes to your child's activity levels and eating habits can have big benefits to their health! Here are some recommendations for parents and caregivers from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

- Limit the amount of high-fat, high-sugar snacks your child eats. These should not be a regular part of your child's diet, but only treats that are served once in a while.
- Encourage your child to drink lots of water instead of sugar-sweetened drinks.
- Serve your child lots of vegetables, fruits, and whole grain products.
- Make physical activity a family experience. Moderate intensity activities include: going for a brisk walk, playing tag, skipping or dancing to music.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Active Healthy Kids Canada (www.activehealthykids.ca)
 Best Start Resource Centre (www.beststart.org/haveaballtogether/campaign.html)
 Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute (www.cflri.ca)
 Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology (www.csep.ca/guidelines)
 Caring for Kids (www.caringforkids.cps.ca)
 McMaster University Child Health & Exercise Medicine Program (fhs.mcmaster.ca/chemp)
 ParticipACTION (www.participaction.com)

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