



**For the week of
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Editor:

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Many reasons for childhood obesity

Why is there such an explosion of childhood obesity these days?

Research has shown what common sense might tell you: There are a lot of reasons why so many children can be classified as obese today.

According to the American Obesity Association, more than 15 percent of children ages 6 through 12 are obese. That's up from 11 percent in 1988-1994 and 7 percent in 1976-1980. Type II diabetes, asthma, high blood pressure, orthopedic complications and other physical problems can result.

Why is this happening? Researchers have identified many risk factors. If parents are obese, children are more likely to be, too. Genetics and common eating habits are both likely causes. As with adults, a poor diet and limited amount of physical activity often add up to extra weight.

Some researchers have pointed out changes in schools' food offerings as one reason for larger school kids. Students often have unlimited access to high-calorie, low-nutrition foods as a la carte items in the cafeteria line and in vending machines. In addition, required courses in physical education also have declined, decreasing the amount of activity and exercise students have as part of their school day.

Also, some research indicates

that children in families who do not eat together at the dinner table are more likely to be overweight than those who do. Paying attention to what children eat seems to help.

Another problem: Eating too many chips, candy bars and other unhealthy snacks. Sugary soft drinks also fall into this category. In fact, 12 percent of preschool-age children, 33 percent of school-age children, and more than 50 percent of adolescents average 9 ounces of soft drinks or more a day.

Other reasons:

- An inability to determine proper portion sizes.
- Eating due to stress, boredom or other reasons besides hunger.
- Eating too much fast food.
- Not participating in enough activity or exercise.

Dietitians recommend that parents, educators and health-care providers work together to make healthful foods more available and decrease access to foods with little nutritional value. Parents can help by eating together as a family as often as possible, paying attention to what their children eat and encouraging children to engage in an hour of physical activity daily.

Chow Line is a service of Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH 43210-1044, or filipic.3@osu.edu.