



Childhood Obesity

The statistics are startling: obesity in children has more than tripled in the past thirty years, and today, [one in three](#) American children and teens is overweight or obese. Even preschoolers and kindergartners are more likely to be overweight than children twenty years ago. The health consequences can be serious and lifelong, ranging from Type 2 diabetes to heart disease. In most cases, childhood obesity is the result of unhealthy eating habits and too little physical activity.

Besides being at higher risk for health problems, overweight and obese children are more likely to be bullied in school and suffer from depression, social isolation, and lower self-esteem. This can set up a vicious cycle in which stress and anxiety result in more overeating. Sometimes the emotional pain can lead to eating disorders, such as binge eating and bulimia.

Poor eating habits can be hard to break. Obese children are more likely to be obese as adults, increasing their risk for diabetes, high blood pressure, cancer, sleep apnea, and other medical conditions. Ideally, efforts to prevent obesity should begin in early childhood.



What Parents and Guardians Can Do

Parents and guardians can play an active role to help children build healthy eating, drinking, physical activity, and sleep habits. For example, take children to the grocery store, teach them about nutritious foods and snacks, and let them plan and prepare weekly meals. Everyone will benefit. Encourage at least an hour a day of physical activity and limit screen time outside of school work to no more than two hours each day. Other [tips](#) include the following:

- Involve the whole family in outdoor activities.
- Ensure your child gets enough sleep for his/her age. Some research links inadequate sleep to weight gain in both children and adults.
- Encourage your child to drink plenty of water. Fruit juices and sodas are often high in sugar and calories and are linked to weight gain and tooth decay.
- Provide a variety of vegetables, fruits, lean meats, and whole grain foods.
- Serve reasonably-sized portions. Portion sizes in restaurants and packages foods may be double or triple what is considered healthy.

- Cut down on salt and sugar.

If your child is already overweight or obese, ask his/her pediatrician or healthcare provider for advice on an eating and physical activity plan. Children have their own set of nutritional needs for growth and development, and a diet that may be suitable for an adult may not be appropriate for children or teens.

If your child attends school in the East Hartford school system, learn more [here](#) about East Hartford's School Based Health Centers.

Are you concerned about a friend or family member's health? If you, or someone you know, is interested in addiction recovery services, mental health care for children or adults, or primary care, contact InterCommunity. To receive services at any of our Hartford or East Hartford locations, please call 860-569-5900.

