



**University
Hospitals Sussex**
NHS Foundation Trust

the
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Children's Hospital



Managing Weight

information for parents, carers & relatives

Why have I been given this leaflet?

Helping your children to stay fit and healthy is really important but it can be hard. We want to support you to by giving you the right information to help your child. Nationally, 1 in 5 children in Reception class are overweight or obese. We know that this figure increases to 1 in 3 children being overweight or obese by the time children reach Year 6.

How do doctors work out if my child is overweight?

Children change all the time, so it can be difficult to say whether they are overweight.

Doctors calculate BMI (body mass index) for children and teens in the same way as they do for adults, by measuring height and weight. A child's BMI is expressed as a 'centile' to show how their BMI compares with children who took part in national surveys. For example, a girl on the 75th centile is heavier than 75 out of 100 other girls her age.

The BMI calculator works out if a child or young person is:

- **Overweight: 91st centile or above**
- **Very overweight: 98th centile or above.**

Why is my child overweight?

Weight is a balancing act between what we eat/drink and how active we are.

Children need physical activity for good mental and physical health- but what you eat, and how much you eat, has a much bigger impact on your weight than how much exercise you do.

Why does it matter?

Overweight and obese children have an increased chance of suffering from bullying and low self-esteem. They are also more likely to remain overweight as an adult. Research shows that most obese adults will have become obese before the age of 11. This increases their chances of developing type 2 diabetes, heart disease, stroke and cancer, so it is really important to deal with obesity in the early years, to try and prevent these diseases in later life.

Unfortunately, some obese children already have features of insulin resistance. This means that these children carry a higher risk of becoming diabetic during their childhood/teenage years if they remain overweight.

Your doctor may decide to give your child some blood tests to help check the impact of being overweight on their health.

How can I help my child?

Here are some key ways to help your child achieve a healthy weight:

1. **Be a role model:** could you aim to make better food choices together with your child
2. Emphasise health and not weight.
3. Be more active
4. Reduce portion sizes
5. Aim for healthy snacks
6. Cut out sugary drinks
7. Try and involve them in food preparation and shopping.
8. Less screen time and more sleep: we know that poor sleep impacts on hormone levels and can partly contribute to weight gain.

Although it can be difficult sometimes to make changes, doing so will help make a difference to improving your child's weight, and more importantly their health. This is not about how your child looks, but about their health. Let them know that you love them whatever their weight and that all you want is for them to be healthy and happy.

What can I do to encourage healthy meal-times and snacks?

- **Try smaller portions:** over time portion sizes have changed (remember when a normal crisp packet was 30g? Now most packets are 'grab' bag size 50g). The link below compares portion sizes compared to everyday items.
- **Portion Sizes for teenagers:** bit.ly/GetPortionWise
- **Fill up on at least 5 portions of fruit/veg a day:** www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well
- Sometimes we get our hunger and thirst signals mixed up. **Teach your child to 'check in':** am I really hungry?
- Encourage kids to wait for 15 minutes before reaching for a second helping. It can take a little while for your brain to feel full after you have eaten. **Play the 'chewing' game:** slow down your eating.
- Fewer snacks are better for teeth. If your child wants to snack, then try simple substitutions to increase your child's fruit and veg intake:
 - Swap crisps for carrots and dip
 - Fresh fruit between meals
 - Add pulses/vegetables to dinners to bulk them out with a great source of protein/fibre.

What is a healthy drink?

Aim to drink plain or fizzy water. You can flavour water with whole pieces of fruit. Fruit juices, 'energy' drinks and shop-bought smoothies are advertised as 'healthy': unfortunately, these drinks can be very high in sugar. Try to avoid fizzy drinks altogether, as they are high in calories and low in nutrients.

How much physical activity should children do?

Exercise improves mood and self-esteem, and it also has positive effects on the heart and insulin-resistance.

The UK recommendations for Children and young people aged 5 to 18 years are:

- Aim for an average of at least 60 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity a day across the week. This activity should raise your heart rate and make you feel warm, for example, walking to school or cycling. It can be in one session or broken into several sessions of 10 mins at a time.
- Reduce the time spent sitting or lying down. Try to have limits on screen time. Speak to your child about removing screens from their bedroom. This will help to improve sleep. We should all aim to be screen-free one hour before getting into bed.

What activities can we do as a family?

- Playground games (such as 'It')
- Ball games
- Climbing frames
- Try a family walk, bike ride or dog walk- Sussex has lots of parks/beaches/woods to get fresh air
- **Joe Wicks HIIT:** bit.ly/FitnessWithJoeWicks
- **Try a new club together:** try the local football or cricket club
- Walk or scoot to school, or get off the bus a few stops earlier.

Who can I contact for further information and advice?

School Nurses can refer you to specialist weight management services if needed. Their contact details are below.

Brighton & Hove:

Healthy Child Programme 0-19 years (Brighton & Hove):

bit.ly/HealthyChildProgramme

School nurses and signposting services: 01273 696011 Ext.1692

If your child is between 5 and 19 years, you can sign up to a **Beezee Bodies Healthy Living Course:**

www.beezeebodies.com/sign-up

If your child is pre-school age, look at www.henry.org.uk/ for videos about healthy eating.

West Sussex:

bit.ly/WestSussexFamilies

School nurses and signposting services: 0300 303 1137

East Sussex:

0300 123 4062 8.30am-5.00pm

East Sussex School Health & Kent Community Health NHS Foundation Trust: www.kentcht.nhs.uk

If your child is between 5-11 years, Ready, Steady, Go is a group programme. Parents can self-refer through here: www.eastsussexchildren.nhs.uk/ready-steady-go/

More resources:

bit.ly/NHSHealthyWeight

www.nhs.uk/change4life/food-facts



The official fundraising arm of the
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This leaflet is intended for patients receiving care in Brighton & Hove or Haywards Heath



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