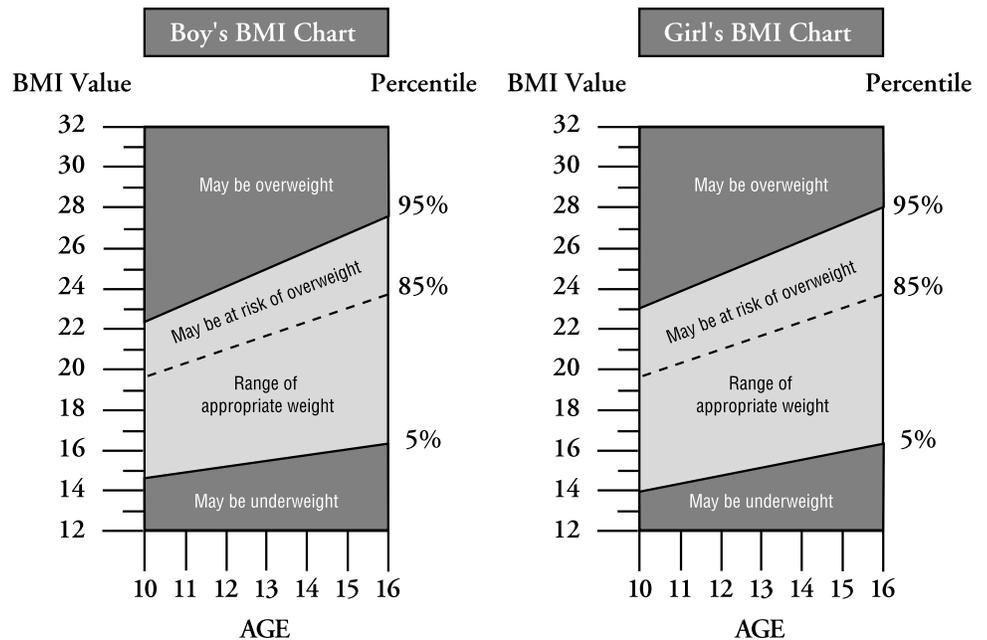


Your Child's Health, Your Child's Weight

Concern over our children's weight is a heavy issue these days. While we should be equally concerned about underweight and overweight children, it is the growing number of overweight children that has captured the nation's attention. You may ask yourself if you should be concerned about your own child's weight. Many children fall within a range of acceptable weights that takes into account their age, sex, height, ethnicity, physical maturity and activity level. How do you tell if your child falls in this acceptable range? One way is to have your child checked by a family physician, pediatrician, health department nurse, school nurse or other health care provider. One of these would check your child's height and weight and compare it to Body Mass Index (BMI) charts. Talk with your health care provider and read on if your child's BMI falls in the "may be overweight" or "at risk of overweight" range.

1. Multiply your child's weight in pounds by 700.
 $\text{_____ pounds} \times 700 = \text{_____}$
2. Divide this answer by your child's height in inches.
 $\text{_____} \div \text{_____ inches} = \text{_____}$
3. Divide this answer by your child's height again.
 $\text{_____} \div \text{_____ inches} = \text{_____}$
 (BMI)
4. Find your child's age at the bottom of the BMI chart, and their BMI value along the left side.
5. Where does your child's weight fall?



Why are so many health professionals concerned about childhood overweight? Overweight children are at a high risk for developing type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol and other early signs of heart disease, joint problems, asthma and sleep problems. They are also more likely to have low self-esteem and other psychological problems.

Do not focus on weight loss right away. Allow an overweight child to increase physical activity and adopt healthy eating habits. This helps an overweight child to slowly learn new behaviors and ease into a healthy weight while growing taller. Children learn eating habits and food preferences from their parents/caregivers. You can set a good example by providing meals from a variety of foods from the Food Guide

Pyramid, and by being active yourself. Be supportive of an overweight child and talk compassionately about his/her weight concerns. Try not to single out an overweight child with special diets and foods. Set family goals - changes in eating habits and physical activity should be adopted by the whole family.

What to do if your child is overweight:

- Be supportive and a role model
- Increase the family's physical activity
- Teach the family healthy eating habits
- Work on gradually adopting healthy behaviors
- Talk to health professionals if additional help is needed

Increase your family's physical activity. Be active yourself and encourage your children to be active. Children need at least one hour of physical activity each day - active play, sports, chores and exercise all count. Exercise videos, jump ropes, hula hoops, and dancing to music are safe indoor activities.

- help an overweight child find activities he/she enjoys and that are not too difficult or embarrassing

- explore sports that develop confidence and skill - tennis, swimming, soccer, softball

- encourage children to try active hobbies, like gardening, bicycling, dancing, roller skating/blading, hiking

- make time for active play, like hop scotch, hide and seek, or shooting hoops

- limit time spent watching TV, playing video games, or surfing the Internet

Teach your family to eat healthy foods. Eat together as a family often so everyone learns healthy eating habits. Keep nutritious foods and snacks in the kitchen. Let your children help plan meals, shop for groceries and prepare meals and snacks. Let the Food Guide Pyramid be your guide.

- focus on whole grains, vegetables, fruits, and low-fat dairy foods

- choose beans, fish, poultry, and lean meats

- limit high calorie foods, such as cookies, candy, chips, and soft drinks

- plan daily snacks like fruit or yogurt, cereal and milk, or crackers

- don't over-restrict foods - "forbidden" foods may become more desirable for children

Don't use food as a reward; it can backfire. Children may resent eating broccoli to get brownies and develop negative feelings toward foods they "have" to eat. Serve small portions of less liked foods. Your child may decide to try them. Mealtime should be a pleasant time everyone looks forward to! Begin by serving a variety of nutritious foods in moderate portions with the Food Guide Pyramid as your guide.

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January 2004

Publication Number: FDNS-E-66