

# Overfat kids — know causes, treatment

## GUEST COLUMN



DR. KEITH LEVICK

Childhood obesity is a prevalent disorder affecting 25 percent of children ages 6 to 17. Medical diseases once related to overweight adults are now found in children.

Hypertension, atherosclerosis, diabetes and hyperlipidemia are a few of these diseases increasingly being suffered by our young. Additionally,

the psychological ramifications can be devastating for the overfat child.

### Causes of obesity

The causes of childhood obesity, like adult obesity, are diverse. There are several reasons why one out of three Michigan children is obese. Genetics are a contributing factor but to what degree they play remains unknown. Family issues also contribute to the reasons why so many children are overfat. For instance, an obese child with two overfat parents has an 80 percent chance of becoming an overfat adult.

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**■ Television viewing is considered a risk factor for childhood obesity. It's estimated that the average American child watches 24 hours of TV a week. Add another 10 to 20 hours when computer games, etc., are included.**

puter games, etc., are included. Not only does television watching substitute for exercise, studies show that during prime-time television viewing, the average person eats eight times more compared to other times. It is understandable how sitting in front of the television is a major contributor to the fattening of children.

### Diet and nutrition

Dietary and nutritional problems are another factor in causing childhood obesity. Even with increased awareness of nutrition, fats, calories, cholesterol and reading food labels, etc., the typical American still lacks the knowledge of fundamental nutrition.

For example, a common scenario found in a supermarket is a parent

holding a bag of potato chips, exclaiming, "Finally, they have come out with a healthy, all-natural, no-cholesterol potato chip!" This, of course, leads to poor food selections by parents — selections that increase a child's daily caloric and fat intake.

Moreover, the preponderance of high-fat foods, convenience foods, fast-food restaurants and other poor eating habits has contributed to the myriad of problems facing the obese child.

### Weight loss, the wrong focus

Unfortunately, there are few effective treatment programs available for the obese child. Consequently, we have overfat children on diets or parents who take their children to adult weight-loss programs. Not only has this proven ineffective but it can be dangerous to the child because restricting calories in children can be dangerous to their growth and development.

Additionally, diets often don't work! We know that approximately 90 percent of dieters regain their weight within one year. Why teach children techniques that are ineffective and dangerous?

### Tips for parents

Since it is likely that an overfat child may grow into an overfat adult, early

prevention is critical. The following are the Ten Commandments of parenting an overfat child:

- Thou shalt be responsible for teaching proper and healthy eating techniques.
- Thou shalt provide a safe, happy and secure environment in which the child can grow, learn and experiment.
- Thou shalt never criticize thy child's eating or weight.
- Thou shalt refrain from nicknames ("chubby," etc.)
- Thou shalt structure meals and snacks.
- Thou shalt not use food for punishment.
- Thou shalt consistently praise thy child.
- Thou shalt enhance thy child's appearance.
- Thou shalt make exercise a way of life for all family members.
- Thou shalt not put thy child on a diet.

Dr. Keith Levick, Ph.D., is the director of The Center for Childhood Weight Management program in Farmington Hills. The Center for Childhood Weight Management currently operates in 17 states as well as Japan, Singapore and Taiwan. To reach Levick, call 810-855-5771.

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