

Childhood Obesity

September is National Childhood Obesity Awareness Month—a great time to learn about healthy growth and how to prevent childhood obesity.

Children with obesity are more likely to experience bullying, social isolation, depression, and lower self-esteem. Obesity is a complex condition with many contributing factors, including nutrition, physical activity levels, and sleep routines. Social Determinants of Health (SDoH) also play a role. There is no simple solution, but there are many ways parents and caregivers can help children lead a healthy lifestyle.

Discuss concerns about weight with your child's provider. They can provide resources to help your child maintain a healthy weight and offer recommendations for reducing their risk of obesity. Never place your child on a weight-reducing diet without consulting their provider. It's important to receive guidance on reducing the rate of weight gain while allowing for normal growth and development.



Participate in the following activities to learn more:

 **Activity 1: Contributing Factors & Prevention Tips**

 **Activity 2: Get Active**

 **Activity 3: Rethink Your Drink Matching Game**

 **Activity 4: Social Determinants of Health**

1 in 5 children aged 2-19 is affected by obesity.

This number has been rising over the past 30 years and has more than tripled since 1980.

For questions or more information, email dhp.health@deancare.com.

Activity 1 – Factors and Prevention Tips:

Learn about factors contributing to overweight and obesity in children and the impact they can have on their health. Also provided are prevention strategies to implement with your children for a healthier lifestyle and to reduce their risk of becoming overweight or developing obesity.

Nutrition

Nutrition is essential during the childhood years. What kids eat affects brain development, metabolism, gut health, and many other areas. Unfortunately, the most common calorie sources for young children in the U.S. are fruit juice, cereal and milk. These foods are *calorie dense* and *nutrient-poor*, meaning the important vitamins and minerals kids need to develop are lacking in these foods. To improve the nutritional environment at home and help children from becoming overweight or developing obesity, try the following:

- **Eat five fruits/vegetables per day.** Have precut fruit and vegetables for kids to eat at meals or snack time—a better alternative than granola bars, candy, or chips. Organize the fridge so fruits and vegetables are at eye level and the first thing kids see when they open it.
- **Cut down on sugars.** Added sugars can contribute to dental decay, weight gain, obesity, type 2 diabetes, and heart disease. Most of us consume too many added sugars—children under the age of two should have no added sugars in their diet, and children over the age of two should keep sugars to less than 10% of their daily calories. To do this, choose whole and minimally processed foods and replace sugary drinks (e.g., fruit juice, soda, flavored milk) with water.
- **Eat meals together.** Make mealtime family time without the distraction of phones, tablets and TVs. Eating should be an enjoyable experience, and it is also an excellent time to be mindful of what you're eating and learn what it feels like to be full.

How much do you know about sugar?

- Watch [“Defining Sweets & Treats \(Move with a Doc\)”](#) to learn about the different types of natural and artificial sweeteners and how to make healthy choices. Be active while you listen!
- Guess how much sugar is in some common beverages (refer to [Activity 3](#)).

Sleep

If children are not getting enough good quality sleep, they may be at risk for type 2 diabetes, obesity, injuries, anxiety, depression, and problems with attention and behavior. Kids aged 6-12 years need 9-12 hours of sleep, and teens aged 13-18 need 8-10 hours. Help your children sleep better with these recommended tips:

- Get children active during the day.
- Make the bedroom dark, quiet, and at a comfortable temperature.
- Have a bedtime routine (e.g., taking a bath, reading).
- Set a consistent sleep schedule—even on weekends.
- Remove all electronic devices from the bedroom (e.g., TV, phone, computer, tablet).
- Avoid heavy meals and caffeine before bedtime.

Screen Time

Too much screen time is linked to depressed mood, sleep deprivation, and lower grades in school—all of which can lead to an increased risk of obesity. Do you know the average amount of time children in different age groups spend in front of screens? Check out this [Screen Time vs. Lean Time](#) tool from the CDC and encourage your kids to be active and find fun activities to do with family members, friends or on their own instead with these tips.

Physical Activity

Not only can physical activity be fun for children, but regular physical activity has so many [health benefits](#):

- Reducing stress and anxiety
- Decreasing blood pressure
- Reducing the risk of depression
- Strengthening bones and muscles
- Improving attention and memory
- Helping with body weight and reducing fat

Children and adolescents should get at least 60 minutes of physical activity every day. Activities should include aerobic (every day of the week) and muscle- and bone-strengthening (at least three days a week). The table below provides some example activities by age group. To learn more about meeting the recommended daily 60 minutes, check out the [Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans \(2nd edition\)](#).

Preschool-Aged Children (3-5 years)	Children and Adolescents (6-17 years)
<p>Daily: Physical activity throughout the day through active play:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Climbing on playground equipment • Hopping, skipping, jumping • Walking, running • Riding a bike • Throwing or kicking a ball 	<p>Daily: 60 minutes (1 hour) or more of moderate to vigorous intensity physical activity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brisk walking (moderate) or running (vigorous) • Bike riding without hills (moderate) or with hills (vigorous) • Active recreation (kayaking, hiking, swimming) • House and yard work (sweeping, mowing) • Games/sports that involve catching and throwing (moderate) or running and chasing (vigorous) • Jumping rope • Martial arts or vigorous dancing <p>At least three days per week:</p> <p><i>Vigorous activity</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Running • Bike riding (with hills) • Games/sports that involve running and chasing (tag, flag football, soccer, basketball, tennis, swimming, cross-country skiing) • Jumping rope • Martial arts or vigorous dancing <p><i>Activity that strengthens muscles</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Games such as tug of war • Resistance exercises using body weight, resistance bands, weight machines, hand-held weights • Rope or tree climbing • Climbing on playground equipment • Some forms of yoga <p><i>Activity that strengthens bones</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hopping, skipping, jumping • Jumping rope • Running • Sports with jumping or rapid changes in direction

Remember:

Children imitate/model the adults in their lives. Be a healthy example for them and adopt these healthy habits, then they will too! And don't make drastic changes all at once—incorporate one change at a time and keep it going for a month or two before making another change. Small steps can lead to huge gains!

Activity 2 – Get Active


























If 60 minutes of activity sounds like a lot, it might be helpful to know that it doesn't have to happen all at once. There are so many ways to squeeze in activity throughout the day. Here are some tips for getting your kids active at different times of the day or year:

- **Before school/Mornings:** Walk the dog, walk or bike to school, or do some morning stretching.
- **At school:** Recess (encourage them to use the playground) and physical education class (find out how much time they spend moving during the class).
- **After school/Evenings:** Let kids be active with friends, siblings, family or on their own (riding a bike, playing outdoors). Get them involved in after-school sports or programs (swimming, soccer, basketball). Give kids chores around the house (yard work, washing the car, cleaning their room).
- **School breaks (summer/winter):** Look for free or low-cost sports/camps at school or a local recreation center. Get active as a family and complete the **outdoor scavenger hunt** below.

How many of these activities does your kid already do, and how long? You might be surprised how quickly it adds up to 60 minutes. For more ideas and information, visit [Move Your Way](#).

Scavenger Hunt:

Grab the family and get out for a walk or hike. On your walk or hike, try to find all the items on the list. In addition to improving physical health, you'll be outside in nature which has additional benefits, including better mental function-concentration and creativity, sharper thinking, boosted happiness, increased self-esteem and confidence, and stress relief.

<p>Squirrel</p> 	<p>Basketball hoop</p> 	<p>Flower</p> 	<p>Bird</p> 	<p>Water hose</p> 
<p>Door wreath</p> 	<p>Lawn mower</p> 	<p>Street sign</p> 	<p>Bike</p> 	<p>Flag</p> 
<p>Bird house or bird feeder</p> 	<p>Insect</p> 	<p>House</p> 	<p>Fence</p> 	<p>Patio furniture</p> 
<p>Fire hydrant</p> 	<p>Mailbox</p> 	<p>Trees</p> 	<p>Stop sign</p> 	<p>Potted plant</p> 
<p>Swing</p> 	<p>Dog</p> 	<p>Trash can</p> 	<p>Bench</p> 	<p>Person walking</p> 

Activity 3 – Rethink Your Drink

Matching Game

Guess how much sugar is in each drink*.

- A. 28 grams or 7 teaspoons of sugar
- B. 34 grams or 8 teaspoons of sugar
- C. 77 grams or 18 teaspoons of sugar
- D. 54 grams or 13 teaspoons of sugar
- E. 50 grams or 12 teaspoons of sugar



20 oz. of
Mountain Dew



20 oz. of
Gatorade



16 oz. of
Chocolate Milk



16 oz. of
Sunny D



16 oz. of
Monster Energy
Drink

**Sugar amounts are based on drinking the entire container, regardless of serving size.*

Make Healthier Drink Choices

Reducing the consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages is a simple yet effective way to improve health. According to the American Heart Association, sugary drinks are the #1 source of added sugar in the American diet, and consumption has been linked to obesity, diabetes, and cavities. Think about how many sugary drinks your kid consumes and try some of the healthy strategies below.

- Always offer water first when your child tells you they're thirsty.
- Try naturally flavored water infused with fruits or herbs.
- Choose healthier options like coconut water, homemade smoothies, or plain, unsweetened milk.
- Explore kid-friendly, caffeine-free teas (e.g., lemongrass, mint, chamomile).
- Carry reusable water bottles whenever the family leaves the house.
- Read ingredients. Sugar often hides in a long list of ingredients under other names, such as sucrose, glucose, fructose, maltose, dextrose, corn syrup and concentrated fruit juice.
- Check the serving size on the label—one bottle often contains two or more servings.
- Limit juice, soda, sports drinks, and sweetened milk or teas.

Activity 4 – Social Determinants of Health

Our health, well-being, quality of life, and life expectancy are affected by many factors other than the medical care we receive. For example, where we grew up, live, and work impacts us too. These factors are part of the social determinants of health (SDoH) and majorly impact people in our communities, creating health disparities and inequities. Poor health outcomes are often the result of the interaction between individuals and their social and physical environment—not a person’s behavior. It can be hard to make healthy food choices and get enough physical activity if these conditions do not support health. For example, people who live in areas without easy access to grocery stores may not have access to healthy foods and are more likely to have an increased risk of heart disease, diabetes, and obesity compared to those who live in areas with greater access.

One of the five goals of [Healthy People 2030](#), the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services initiative to improve health and well-being nationwide, is to “create social, physical, and economic environments that promote attaining the full potential for health and well-being for all.” Healthy People 2030 uses a placed-based framework that outlines five SDoH categories.

The Five SDoH Categories:

Unscramble the **UNDERLINED** words to discover each category. The answer key and examples of each are at the bottom of the page.

1. **CMCECNOIO** Stability = _____ Stability
2. **TDCUENAIIO** Access and Quality = _____ Access and Quality
3. **CHAEHRTALE** Access and Quality = _____ Access and Quality
4. Neighborhood and Built **NRNEINMETOV** = Neighborhood and Built _____
5. **OLISAC** and **MITCMOYNU** Context = _____ and _____ Context

Learn more:

- [Achieving Health Equity \(RWJ Foundation\)](#)
- [About Social Determinants of Health \(CDC\)](#)
- [How Social Determinants Impact Healthcare \(TEDxFonduLac\)](#)

1. **Economic Stability:** Employment opportunities, income level, food security, stable housing
2. **Education Access and Quality:** Educational level, language and literacy skills
3. **Healthcare Access and Quality:** Access to healthcare, health literacy
4. **Neighborhood and Built Environment:** Crime and violence, environmental conditions such as air pollution and not having access to clean water, access to transportation, and nutritious foods
5. **Social and Community Context:** Relationships, social supports and interactions, racism, discrimination

Answer Key: