

How To Protect Your Child from Adolescent Obesity

Written by Nicole Tyau

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Dr. Susan Wilder is a family practitioner in Scottsdale who specializes in functional medicine. With Arizona ranking 36th in the nation for childhood obesity rates among high school students, Dr. Wilder wants parents to know how to teach healthy habits that will last a lifetime.

Health Starts Before Birth

"The habits we set in childhood are the habits that are often lifelong," Dr. Wilder says. Metabolic syndrome, according to Wilder, is when a woman's blood sugar, blood pressure, cholesterol, and triglycerides have affected her health because of an unhealthy diet and sedentary lifestyle. "There are...effects on her offspring for generations," Wilder says. "So her children—even if they were to eat perfectly—have significantly higher rates of obesity, of diabetes, of hypertension, of premature heart disease."

Every Child is At Risk

Even from the youngest age, children are marketed to for foods that contain "obesigenics," which are saturated with unhealthy fats and sugars and are specifically designed to be addictive, Wilder says. A 2009 study from the American Psychological Association says that 44 percent of children ages 8-12 reported that they feel stressed about doing well in school. The report went on to say that physical effects—headaches (reported by over 33 percent of kids) and trouble sleeping (reported by 44 of children)—often go overlooked by parents, as only 13 percent of parents in each category believe their children experience these problems. Wilder says it's important to teach children how to cope with high stress in their lives through methods like meditation, mindfulness, and deep breathing.

Make Regular Visits to Your Doctor

"A muffin top in a child is not normal," Wilder says. The healthy growth curve is a medical predictor of what a child's healthy weight should be at certain heights and ages. Wilder says pediatricians need to be firm in expressing concerns about a child's weight, and parents need to take doctors seriously about their child's health.



Model Healthy Habits

"There is a recent study that says that less than 4 percent of our population actually exhibits all health habits—from eating healthy to exercising sufficiently to getting healthy sleep," Wilder says. It's important for everyone's health to make good choices, but parents can especially make a lifelong impact on their children's health and self esteem. If you're concerned about your child's weight, consult your doctor and formulate the best way of talking in a positive, constructive way to change their habits. "We all need to be better," Wilder says. "We're all stewards of our health."

Get Involved

[Healthy Life Stars](#), a group that aims to "educate and motivate children to lead active, healthy lives," is hosting a StepUp4Kids Walkathon next month. From Oct. 16-23, log your steps individually or as part of a team. Prizes are awarded to the top 25 kids, the top three adults, and the best

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overall team. In November, Dr. Wilder is being honored at a charity event celebrating the winners of the Walkathon and raising awareness of childhood obesity.