

Children's Health Clinic

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Overweight: Why Is My Child Gaining Too Much Weight?

Fatness is often simply normal and necessary for a child.

Sometimes, however, fatness is abnormal and unnecessary. Here are some of the reasons children gain unnecessary weight.

- **Overfeeding:** It's hard to overfeed a child. To do so, you would need to insist at almost every feeding that your child eat more than he wants. Children naturally know how much they need to eat, and they automatically make up for eating too much. If they overeat, they don't get hungry as quickly or they don't eat as much the next time.
- **Providing Only Caloric Beverages:** If, when children are thirsty, the only choices are juice, milk, or soda, they could get too many calories. Children need to learn to drink water for thirst and drink milk and juice as mealtime and snacktime foods.
- **Feeding to Quiet an Upset Child:** It's easy to give an upset or crying toddler a cookie when you want some peace. Unfortunately, that action teaches the toddler to think about eating whenever she gets upset. It is best to stick to a set time for meals and snacks.
- **Limiting Exercise:** Children may gain weight if they have too little exercise. For example, they may have an injury such as a broken leg that makes it difficult for them to move around. Children will normally be active if they can. Give children a safe environment and room to move around and play so they can be as active as possible.
- **Limiting How Much They Eat:** If you try to get children to eat less than they would like to eat, they become preoccupied with food and overeat when they get the chance. Children who are fed in this controlled fashion become fatter, not thinner, than children who are allowed to eat until they are full.
- **Failing to Recognize Family Stress:** Children sometimes react to stress by eating too much, exercising too little, or both. Instead of trying to get them to eat less or exercise more, it is important to get to the bottom of what is going wrong. Then you can try to change the situation and help them to feel better.
- **Struggling Over Food:** Studies show that children who later become fat had more feeding problems in the early years than children who stay slim. Struggles over eating can interfere with a child's ability to know how hungry he is.

When should I call my child's health care provider?

Call during office hours if:

- You and your child are struggling over eating.
 - Your child has suddenly gained a lot of weight.
 - You don't know how to stop limiting your child's food intake.
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Published by McKesson Health Solutions LLC.

This content is reviewed periodically and is subject to change as new health information becomes available. The information is intended to inform and educate and is not a replacement for medical evaluation, advice, diagnosis or treatment by a healthcare professional.

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