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Obesity in Children: Why the Concern is Growing

September is Childhood Obesity Awareness Month, a time to raise awareness of the growing issue of childhood obesity and promote healthy habits for children. Childhood obesity is a serious public health issue that affects millions of children around the world. According to the World Health Organization, the number of overweight or obese children under the age of 5 has nearly doubled since 1990, and it continues to rise.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that roughly one in five children in the United States between the ages of 2 and 19 is affected by obesity, meaning they have a body mass index, or BMI, at or above the 95th percentile for their age and sex. Compared to children at a healthy weight, children who are overweight or obese are at a higher risk for asthma, sleep apnea, bone and joint problems, type 2 diabetes and heart disease.

Causes of Childhood Obesity

Childhood obesity is caused by a combination of factors, including genetics, environment and lifestyle. Some of the main causes of childhood obesity include:

- 1. Unhealthy diets:** Children who consume high-calorie, low-nutrient foods, such as fast food, sugary drinks and snacks, are at risk of becoming overweight or obese.
- 2. Lack of physical activity:** Children who don't get enough exercise are at risk of gaining weight and developing health problems.
- 3. Genetics:** Children who have a family history of obesity are more likely to become obese themselves.
- 4. Environmental factors:** Factors such as food deserts, lack of access to healthy foods and marketing of unhealthy foods to children can also contribute to childhood obesity.



What Parents Can Do

Parents play a crucial role in preventing childhood obesity. Here are some steps you can take to promote healthy habits for your children:

- 1. Encourage healthy eating:** Include a variety of fruits, vegetables, whole grains and lean proteins — and encourage your kids to participate in meal preparation, if they are old enough. Limiting high-calorie, low-nutrient foods and drinks can also help.
- 2. Promote physical activity:** Encouraging regular physical activity, such as playing outside, riding bikes or participating in sports, can help your kids maintain a healthy weight.
- 3. Set a good example:** If you model healthy behaviors, such as eating nutritious foods and being physically active, chances are that you'll influence your children to adopt healthy habits, too.
- 4. Limit screen time:** Children who spend too much time in front of screens are at risk of becoming overweight or obese. Set a limit on screen time and encourage other activities, such as reading or playing outside.
- 5. Seek help if needed:** If a child is already overweight or obese, talk to your pediatrician about developing a weight management plan that includes a healthy diet and regular physical activity.



Sneaky Ways to Get More Activity in Your Day

Experts recommend working up to at least 150 minutes of physical activity each week. You can break your activity up throughout the day as you work towards this goal. Here are a few ideas to boost your activity:

- Walk or bike to work, if you live close enough.
- Take the stairs instead of the elevator.
- Park farther away from your destination.
- Stand up and move around regularly, at least once per hour.
- Take a walk during your lunch break.
- Do some stretching or light exercise while watching TV.
- Walk your dog!

Soon, you'll find that small changes to your daily routine can make a big difference in your overall physical activity level.



Discover and Leverage Your Strengths

Knowing and using your strengths is an important part of personal and professional development. It can help you to identify your natural talents and abilities and allow you to focus on areas where you have a greater potential for success.

One way to discern your strengths is to take a personality or strengths assessment. These assessments are designed to help you identify your unique combination of strengths, weaknesses and personality traits.

The VIA Institute created a personalized survey that has become the main research-based test of character strengths in the world, measuring 24 character strengths, such as fairness, social intelligence, kindness, curiosity, love of learning, bravery and humility.

Another key resource is the CliftonStrengths® assessment that is designed to uncover certain key talents (patterns of thought, feeling and behavior) that can be productively applied. These patterns are categorized into 34 broad themes, such as Achiever, Ideation and Relator. These themes indicate and predict one's innate and unique talents.

Once you know your strengths, try these exercises to develop them:

- **Practice, practice, practice.** Pick one of your top strengths and practice it for a week. For example, if a top strength is gratitude, write down everything you are grateful for each day. Or, if creativity is a strength, find a creative solution to a challenge that you or a friend are facing.
- **Spot strengths in others.** At your next work meeting or family gathering, try to notice strengths as they occur. Spot a co-worker's leadership strength as she organizes and plans group activities, or note your uncle's humor as he keeps the family laughing out loud.

Remember, everyone has unique strengths and weaknesses, and there is no single "right" way to identify or use them. The key is to be self-aware and intentional in your efforts to leverage your strengths for greater success and fulfillment.



Five Simple Tips for Saving Money on a Tight Budget

Living on a tight budget can be challenging, but it is possible to save money even with limited resources. Here are five simple tips to help you save money on a tight budget:

- 1. Cut unnecessary expenses.** Take a close look at your spending and identify any unnecessary expenses. This could include things like subscriptions, premium TV channels, memberships or services that you don't use regularly. Cancel these expenses and redirect the money you save into a savings account.
- 2. Use coupons and discount codes.** Before making any purchases, check for coupons and discount codes that you can use to save money. There are many websites and apps that offer discounts on everything from groceries to clothing and even travel.
- 3. Cook at home.** Eating out can be expensive, so try to cook at home as much as possible. Plan your meals in advance and buy ingredients in bulk to save money. You can also save money by packing your own lunches and snacks for work or school.
- 4. Set savings goals.** Having a savings goal can be a powerful motivator to save money. Set a specific amount that you want to save each month and make it a priority to reach that goal. Even if you can only save a small amount, every little bit helps.
- 5. Shop smart.** When shopping for necessities, look for ways to save money. This could include buying generic brands instead of name brands, using cash back or rewards programs or shopping at discount stores. You can also save money by buying items in bulk or waiting for sales.

Keep Your Blood Pressure in Check With These Simple Home Monitoring Tips!

Monitoring blood pressure is important because high blood pressure (also known as hypertension) is a significant risk factor for many serious health problems, including heart disease, stroke, kidney disease and dementia. When left untreated, high blood pressure can cause damage to blood vessels and organs over time.

If you have been diagnosed with high blood pressure, taking regular readings can help you track your condition and prevent complications. Blood pressure can fluctuate throughout the day in response to various factors, such as physical activity, stress and medication.

Here are some tips for getting accurate readings at home:

1. Choose a reliable blood pressure monitor: There are two types of blood pressure monitors: manual and digital. Digital monitors are more common, easy to use and more accurate. Make sure to choose a monitor that has been validated by the Association for the Advancement of Medical Instrumentation (AAMI).
2. Sit quietly for 5-10 minutes before taking your blood pressure measurement. Avoid smoking, caffeine and exercise for at least 30 minutes before the measurement. It is also important to use the bathroom before the measurement.
3. Place the cuff on your upper arm and make sure it fits snugly but not too tight. The bottom of the cuff should be about 1 inch above your elbow.
4. Press the start button on the blood pressure monitor and wait for the measurement to be completed. Keep your arm still and avoid talking or moving during the measurement.
5. Write down your systolic and diastolic blood pressure readings, along with the date and time. It is also helpful to record any other factors that may have affected the measurement, such as medication changes or stressful events.

If you notice any changes in your blood pressure or have concerns about your cardiovascular health, consult with your healthcare provider.

The Importance of Preventive Care

Getting preventive care each year is essential for maintaining good health and preventing potential health problems. Examples of preventive care include annual check-ups, cancer screenings, immunizations and lifestyle counseling. By making preventive care a priority each year, you can take charge of your health and stay ahead of potential health problems. Plus, eligible in-network preventive care is generally covered at 100% by medical insurance.

Here are a few reasons why you should make preventive care a priority:

1. **Preventive care** includes screenings and exams that can detect health problems early, when they are easier to treat.
2. Many chronic diseases, such as diabetes and heart disease, can be prevented or managed through regular **preventive care**.
3. **Preventive care** is usually less expensive than treating a health problem once it has developed.
4. Regular **preventive care** can give you peace of mind knowing you have taken steps to maintain good health and prevent potential health problems.

