



A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

Preschool Weight Training

Obesity Trends and Geographic Differences among Low-Income Preschool-Aged Children — United States, 1998–2008

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[Announcer] This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC — safer, healthier people.

[Dr. Gaynes] Welcome to *A Cup of Health with CDC*, a weekly feature of the MMWR, the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. I'm your host, Dr. Robert Gaynes.

Obesity is one of the leading public health problems in the U.S., especially among children. A recent CDC study found that the number of preschool-aged children who are overweight has increased over the past decade.

Dr. Larry Grummer-Strawn is the chief of the Nutrition Branch at CDC. He's joining us today to discuss the problem of obesity in children. Welcome to the show, Larry.

[Dr. Grummer-Strawn] Thank you.

[Dr. Gaynes] Larry, how is obesity determined?

[Dr. Grummer-Strawn] We define obesity using a child's weight and their height, and from those we calculate their body mass index in the same way that we do so in adults. With adults, we can use that body mass index as a number directly, whereas with children, we actually have to compare it to other children – of the same age, of the same sex – and we get an index of how they compare to other children and define obesity using that.

[Dr. Gaynes] What percentage of the U.S. population is considered to be obese?

[Dr. Grummer-Strawn] It depends on whether you're talking about adults or children. The most recent estimates in adults are that 34 percent of adults are considered to be obese. In children, looking at the study that we published just this week, we were looking at children two to five years old, and we had found that 14 1/2 percent of them are obese, so about one in seven.

[Dr. Gaynes] What is the primary cause of obesity in children?

[Dr. Grummer-Strawn] Well, the causes in children are really the same as they are in adults. When people take in more calories than they're expending, they have to put those calories somewhere and they tend to put them into fat tissue and so they become obese over time. So the problem that we're looking at is that they're really taking in too many calories or not expending too many calories.

[Dr. Gaynes] Larry, can being overweight as a child lead to other health problems?

[Dr. Grummer-Strawn] Most definitely; some of the things that we're concerned about with obesity are the development of heart disease, we're concerned about high cholesterol, high blood pressure, certainly an increased risk of developing type 2 diabetes, issues of asthma. Many of these are concerns that particularly affect older children and adults but the conditions actually start in childhood. It increases their risk as young children, but certainly sets them on a course for having these problems later on in life.

[Dr. Gaynes] What steps can parents take to help children achieve and maintain a healthy weight?

[Dr. Grummer-Strawn] Well, parents need to be looking at the intake of their children and their expenditure of energy. We really want them to be thinking about good nutrition from a number of perspectives. Good nutrition starts with breastfeeding early in life and we know that breastfeeding protects against the development of obesity in children.

We want them to be thinking about the beverages that their children are drinking. They shouldn't be having a lot of sugared beverages. They should be thinking about water and milk as good alternatives, instead. They need to be thinking about the kinds of snacks that they're giving their children. Think about healthy snacks that don't have a lot of sugar, don't have a lot of fat in them.

They also need to be thinking about the physical activity that their kids get. Do their kids get to go outside and play? Do they have access to a playground? Kids are actually expected to have about 60 minutes of being physically active – doing something – during the day. So we really want parents to be thinking about what are the opportunities that their children have to be physically active.

One of the philosophies that we have here at CDC is that we want to make the healthy choice the easy choice. So we encourage parents to find ways that they can actually change the world that they live in to make it easy for them to give their children good, nutritious diets and have their children be physically active. So when they're choosing a day care, we encourage them to talk with the day care facilities about how do they feed the children, do they have sugared beverages there at the day care, do they have the children sitting down and watching television rather than going outside and playing? And they should help their day cares to try and change those policies or they should choose day cares that don't have some of those bad practices.

We'd also encourage them to think about the places that they live. Do they have, in their neighborhood, sidewalks that they can take their children to a park. And can they choose neighborhoods to live in that have those things or, if they don't, are there ways that they can work with the city and the county to get those things put in place so that they can actually raise their children in an environment that is conducive to good health?

[Dr. Gaynes] Larry, where can listeners get more information about preventing obesity in children?

[Dr. Grummer-Strawn] We would invite people to come to our website. If they go to www.cdc.gov, up in the search box, they can just type in the word “obesity” and the first link that they’ll have will take them right to our obesity page. That will talk about a lot of issues on obesity. If they want to learn specifically about childhood obesity, there’s a link right there at the top of that page that can take them to more specific information.

[Dr. Gaynes] Thanks, Larry.

[Dr. Grummer-Strawn] Thank you; appreciate being with you today.

[Dr. Gaynes] I’ve been talking today with CDC’s Dr. Larry Grummer-Strawn about obesity in children.

Children who are obese are at increased risk for health problems, such as diabetes, asthma, and high blood pressure. Parents — you can help by ensuring your kids eat a healthy diet and get plenty of exercise. See your healthcare provider to assess your child’s risk for obesity and learn ways to overcome the problem.

Until next time, be well. This is Dr. Robert Gaynes for *A Cup of Health with CDC*.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO, 24/7.