

# Childhood Obesity Awareness Month

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's no simple solution, but there are many ways you can help your child lead a healthy lifestyle.

Discuss any concerns you have about your child's weight with their 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 get 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  
and Prevention Tips

Activity 2:  
Get Active

Activity 3:  
Rethink Your Drink  
Matching Game

Activity 4:  
Social Determinants of  
Health

**One in five 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 [wellness@medica.com](mailto:wellness@medica.com)

# Health Disparities

“Health disparities” are preventable differences in health among different social or racial groups, and they are a complex and challenging problem across the world. Social factors play the largest role in shaping the overall health of communities. For example, the ability to access healthcare, a safe living environment, racial equity, nutritious food, quality education, and supportive relationships free of discrimination are all incredibly important to your overall health.

People who face health disparities often have a higher risk for obesity. In the U.S., certain racial and ethnic groups experience a higher risk of medical conditions and an increased likelihood of being diagnosed with related conditions.

## Did You Know?

- Obesity is more prevalent among American Indian and/or Native Alaskan, non-Hispanic Black, and Hispanic children compared with their white and Asian peers. ([source](#))
- Childhood obesity has been linked to genetic, biological, social, and environmental causes and risk factors, and is associated with multiple health consequences. ([source](#))
- Obesity rates are 26% among Hispanic children, 24% among non-Hispanic Black children, 16% among non-Hispanic white children, and 9% among non-Hispanic Asian children. ([source](#))

For more information, please visit:

- [Eat Right \(Academy of Nutrition\)](#)
- [Take Charge of Your Health: A Guide for Teenagers \(National Institute of Health\)](#)
- [Healthy Weight, Nutrition, and Physical \(Centers for Disease Control and Prevention\)](#)

## Activity 1: Factors and Prevention Tips

Learn about contributing factors to children being overweight or obese and the impact it has on their health. We also provide some prevention strategies you can apply with your child for a healthier lifestyle and to reduce their risk of becoming overweight or developing obesity.

### Nutrition

Good nutrition is so fundamental for children it is hard to overstate its importance. 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 they don't have the necessary vitamins and minerals kids need for development. 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.** Sugar adds calories but really has no other nutritional value. Added sugars can lead to dental decay, weight gain, obesity, type 2 diabetes, and heart disease. Children under two should have no added sugars in their diet, and children over 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.

#### How much do you know about sugar?

- Watch [“Defining Sweets and Treats”](#) to learn about different types of natural and artificial sweeteners and how to make healthy choices.
- Play [Rethink Your Drink](#) and guess how much sugar is found in some common drinks.

- **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.

## 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 child sleep better with these tips:

- Get children active during the day.
- Make the bedroom dark, quiet, and 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 how much time children spend in front of screens? Find out with the [Screen Time vs. Lean Time](#) tool from the CDC and get some ideas for fun activities and ways your kids can be active with family members, friends, or on their own.

## Physical Activity

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

- Reduces stress and anxiety
- Decreases blood pressure
- Reduces the risk of depression
- Strengthens bones and muscles
- Improves attention and memory
- Helps with body weight and reduces fat

### Recommended physical activity and examples by age group

#### Preschool-Aged Children (3-5 years)

##### Daily:

Physical activity throughout the day through active play.

- Climbing on playground equipment
- Hopping, skipping, jumping, walking, running
- Riding a bike
- Throwing or kicking a ball

## Recommended physical activity and examples by age group

### Children and Adolescents (6-17 years)

#### Daily:

At least 60 minutes (1 hour) of moderate to vigorous intensity physical activity.

- 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

#### At least three days per week:

##### *Vigorous activity*

- 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

##### *Activity that strengthens muscles*

- 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

##### *Activity that strengthens bones*

- Hopping, skipping, jumping, jumping rope, running
- Sports with jumping or rapid changes in direction

To learn more about meeting the recommended daily 60 minutes, check out the [Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans \(2<sup>nd</sup> edition\)](#).

#### Remember:

Children model the adults in their lives. Lead by example and adopt these healthy habits yourself; then they will too! You don't need to 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 help you 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 for 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:

Round up the family for a walk or hike and try to find all the items on the list. You'll be supporting both physical health and mental health. Spending time in nature improves concentration and creativity, boosts happiness, increases self-esteem and confidence, and helps with stress relief.

Squirrel 	Basketball hoop 	Flower 	Bird 	Water hose 
Door wreath 	Lawnmower 	Street sign 	Bike 	Flag 
Birdhouse or bird feeder 	Insect 	House 	Fence 	Patio Furniture 
Fire hydrant 	Mailbox 	Trees 	Stop sign 	Potted plant 
Swing 	Dog 	Trash can 	Bench 	Person walking 

# 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

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20 oz. of  
Gatorade

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16 oz. of  
Chocolate Milk

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16 oz. of  
Sunny D

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16 oz. of  
Monster Energy  
Drink

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\*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 number one 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 ingredient labels. 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

A child’s health, well-being, quality of life, and life expectancy are affected by factors other than the medical care they receive. For example, where they grow up, live, and go to school impacts them too. These factors are part of the social determinants of health (SDoH), and they majorly impact so many people in communities across the country, creating health disparities and inequities.

Poor health outcomes in children can often be a result of their social and physical environment—not just behavior. They may not be able to make healthy food choices or get enough physical activity if their environment does not support health. For example, families who don’t have easy access to grocery stores may not have access to healthy foods, or children with a limited number of neighborhood amenities (e.g., sidewalks, parks, recreation/community centers) may have limited physical activity opportunities. These factors can lead to a child’s increased risk of being overweight or obese compared to those who live in areas with greater access and amenities.

One of the five goals of [Healthy People 2030](#), an initiative of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 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 place-based framework that outlines five SDoH categories.

## The Five SDoH Categories:

Unscramble the **UNDERLINED** words to discover each category. You can find the answers and examples of each 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 \(TEDxFonduLac\)](#)

Answer key:

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