

CHILDHOOD OBESITY AND THE IMPORTANCE OF STAYING ACTIVE

LA OBESIDAD INFANTIL Y LA IMPORTANCIA DE MANTENERSE ACTIVO

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Abstract

Childhood obesity is a problem that has been present for several years, not only in the United States but in several countries worldwide. Some of the most common issues caused by obesity in children are high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and diabetes. As leading causes of childhood obesity, we can mention family, socioeconomic factors, and lack of physical activity. Creating good eating habits, promoting physical activity as part of the daily routine are excellent strategies to combat and prevent childhood obesity.

Key Words

Childhood obesity, physical activity, eating habits, overweight, healthy nutrition.

Resumen

La obesidad infantil es un problema que lleva varios años presente, no solo en Estados Unidos sino en varios países del mundo. Algunos de los problemas más comunes que puede causar la obesidad en los niños y niñas son: la presión arterial alta, el colesterol alto y la diabetes. Como principales causas de obesidad infantil podemos mencionar factores familiares, socioeconómicos y falta de actividad física. La creación de hábitos alimentarios adecuados, promoviendo la actividad física como parte de

la rutina diaria, son excelentes estrategias para combatir y prevenir la obesidad infantil.

Palabras clave

Obesidad infantil, actividad física, hábitos alimenticios, sobrepeso, nutrición saludable.

When analyzing the problems that currently affect our society, we could list several that directly affect our children; one of these is obesity and overweight, which puts children and adolescents at risk for poor health. Obesity prevalence in children and adolescents is very high and causes a lot of problems for school aged kids. Even when they become adults, it can lead to depression, and social anxiety.

Obesity affects children not only in the U.S. but in many other countries around the world. Some families do not know the severe consequences such as diabetes problems, blood pressure, and high cholesterol that obesity can generate in children. For this reason, it is essential to know some ways to avoid being overweight in childhood.

In this essay we want to discuss how Childhood Obesity is a problem caused by family

factors, lack of physical activity, and socioeconomic factors. In a second part we are going to propose how Childhood Obesity can be effectively addressed by promoting physical activity and shaping healthy eating habits in children.

Families play a crucial role in the mental and physical development of children. There are some specific family factors such as portion control, excessive consumption of junk food, and a sedentary lifestyle that can affect children and lead to obesity. In some cases, obesity has to do with genetics, which means that some kids might have that preexisting condition in their families. Busy lifestyle also causes families to have less time to spend with their children, missing opportunities to spend time outdoors walking or playing. It is also known that having an overweight parent and living in a single-parent household can be associated with obesity and overweight. (Sahoo, K., Sahoo, B., Choudhury, A., Sofi, N., Kumar, R., & Bhadoria, A. April 2015).

Another critical factor that we must include when discussing childhood obesity is the lack of physical activity that most kids have. In a world where technology is everywhere, and one can find everything online; social media, gaming, tv streaming, and more, exercising can be very unappealing to many. Some kids spend unlimited hours in front of a screen, and when they are exposed to any kind of physical activity, indoors or outdoors, they don't find it interesting and get tired or bored quickly. Advertising of all kinds of unhealthy foods on tv, and the stereotyping of unrealistic body ideals can bring the wrong message to children. Including some physical activity in the daily routine can be very beneficial for weight control.

Socioeconomic factors also create a significant impact on the number of children suffering from obesity and overweight.

According to the CDC, obesity affects low-income families more than children with higher-income families. Government programs such as WIC aim to ensure those families with low income

receive supplemental assistance for food. In the end, it is the family's choice of what food to purchase and the eating habits they create and encourage their children to follow. In some cases, families are not aware of this assistance programs or choose not to access them due to legal status or other factors, taking away an opportunity to provide better food options for their families. (CDC. May 24, 2021).

We can conclude that childhood obesity and overweight is a problem caused by family factors, lack of physical activity and socioeconomic status to name a few. Families and educators must make sure kids stay healthy to prevent any other issues they might have in the future. Encouraging physical activity at home and school and making sure that low-income families have access to the available resources to supply food for their kids is vital to help control obesity and overweight in children.

Physical Activity and Eating Habits, Strategies to prevent Childhood Obesity

When talking about the importance of physical activity, it is vital to know that, like most activities such as watching TV, reading or listening to music, physical activity must become a habit. An excellent alternative is to walk. Walking is an activity that one can do at any age. There are programs like the Mall Walking, focusing on safe ways to motivate people to walk. Considering that those who walk frequently and are physically active live longer and have a lower risk of having heart problems, strokes, type diabetes: 2, some types of cancer, and depression, walking can be an excellent and complete activity for the entire family. (CDC April 30, 2018).

It is crucial to reduce the sedentary time in children so that physical activity becomes part of daily activities. Help the little ones to monitor the time they spend in front of the TV or the computer. As adults, doing physical activity

frequently and inviting children to do it is significant since they learn by imitating the adults with whom they live. (CDC May 24, 2021).

Turning physical activity into a family hobby, instills in children a habit that will benefit them throughout their lives, and this will be reflected in their good physical and mental health.

Continuing with the importance of creating healthy habits in children, eating habits must be mentioned. In a busy world, with no time to plan meals at home, it is easy to fall into the habit of eating junk food, not only because it is fast and saves us time, but because thanks to advertising, it is presented as a convenient alternative, which is also very attractive to children.

Planning meals in advance can be an excellent option and introducing children to healthy and nutritious foods in their daily meals and snacks can help too. Fruits and vegetables can be presented as an alternative to snacks and drinking water instead of sugary drinks will help children get used to eating healthy from a young age. The easiest way to avoid eating foods high in sugar, fat, or sodium is to avoid buying them and replace them with healthy alternatives at home. (CDC May 24, 2021).

Due to a lack of education on the subject, many families may not be so easy to understand and know what foods to feed their children. There are resources on the internet such as "What's on your plate" that allow you to do a personalized quiz to find out your family goals and give your family a healthy diet. (USDA 2021).

These resources presented by the U.S. government allow families and caregivers to become informed and educated on the importance of healthy child nutrition. Simple samples such as "My Plate Plan" allow creating a personalized plan based on age, weight, sex, and height, as well as on the level of physical activity that the person does. These resources are free and accessible to anyone. (USDA 2021).

Considering the resources available to obtain information on how to combat the problem of childhood obesity by creating healthy habits, one can conclude that it is a social responsibility to help children grow up healthy. Some of the ways to avoid and combat childhood obesity are by promoting physical activity and creating healthy eating habits in children.

Resources

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