



# Childhood Obesity

## Prevention is key

**Childhood obesity is on the rise. Dr. Laurent Legault, a pediatric endocrinologist at The Montreal Children's Hospital of The McGill University Health Centre, estimates 20 to 25% of children in Quebec are overweight or obese. A person is obese when he or she weighs at least 20% more than a healthy weight based on the body mass index (weight/height ratio). It is important to monitor your child's size and weight according to growth charts so ask your pediatrician if your child is maintaining a proper weight.**

Obesity tends to run in the family. It is partly genetic and partly linked to lifestyle. Weight gain most commonly starts around age five to six, and/or at the beginning of adolescence.

If you instill healthy lifestyle habits in your children at an early age there's a strong chance they'll keep these habits well into adulthood. Helping your children maintain a healthy weight will contribute to preventing diseases related to being overweight or obese.





### **Causes of obesity**

Most children are not active enough. In addition, it is not always easy for children to make the right food choices. For example, ready-to-eat foods are very popular and fast food restaurants are found almost everywhere. Our children are also more sedentary than before and spend a lot of time in front of the TV, computers, and video games.

Generally, if obesity is severe, it will continue into adulthood. Therefore, it is very important to develop good eating habits and a love of exercise during childhood.

### **Consequences of obesity**

Obesity greatly increases the risk of developing:

- type 2 diabetes
- cardiovascular disease
- hypertension
- orthopedic problems
- sleep problems (sleep apnea)

In addition, obese children are often rejected or made fun of by their peers, which makes them more likely to suffer psychological problems.

# Tips to prevent obesity



**Parents are in the best position to help their child maintain a healthy weight and avoid medical problems both now and in the future. Here are some ways to help your child maintain a proper weight:**

- 1** Breastfeed your newborn if possible. It is an excellent way to help your baby avoid gaining too much weight.
- 2** If your child is two years of age or older and is gaining weight rapidly, switch to 2% milk.
- 3** Encourage your child to be active and to play outdoors. There are usually organized activities available for children three years and older.
- 4** Plan structured after-school activities to avoid long periods without supervision. This may help reduce time spent watching TV or playing videogames.
- 5** Sign-up your children for playgroup or daycare activities, i.e. trips to the park or the pool, especially if you do not have a lot of time to share physical activities with them.
- 6** Avoid serving and/or keeping soft drinks and high-sugar snacks at home. These beverages could easily account for 25% of daily calorie intake.
- 7** Never leave candy within reach of your child (e.g. on the bottom shelf of a cupboard or in the refrigerator) and avoid buying unhealthy foods (chips, cookies, chocolate, etc.) At Halloween, set a date to throw out all leftover candy.
- 8** Make sure your child understands mealtime is the time to eat and he cannot “snack” all day long.
- 9** Limit the amount of time your child spends watching television, playing on the computer or playing video games. In general, no more than two hours a day is recommended.
- 10** Set a good example for your child: eat slowly, increase your own physical activity and promote activities involving the whole family.

