

The Effects of CHILDHOOD OBESITY

The negative physical effects of childhood obesity are well-known. However, the psychological and emotional effects are equally devastating. As the rate of childhood obesity escalates, more and more children are growing up socially stigmatized, victimized and disadvantaged.

An early study showed children six pictures- four were children with varying disabilities, one was an average weight child, and one was an overweight child. The children were asked to rank the pictures in order of preference for friendship and likeability. **The overweight child ranked last in both categories.**

When this study was recently repeated, the results were similar, with one important exception: **the overweight child's likability had declined by 40%.**

These and similar studies, combined with the fact that **50%** of North American children are now overweight or obese (a **40%** increase over 40 years), shows that obesity is a serious problem effecting the psychological and emotional welfare of Canada's youth.

Internalizing Weight Stigma

Studies suggest that many obese or overweight children and teens internalize the societal stigma and negative stereotypes. Negative attributes associated with being overweight include- being self-indulgent, lacking discipline, stupid, selfish, ugly and sloppy.

Unlike other socially-isolated groups who bond together, reinforced by the very stigma that isolates them, overweight children **get no such support.** In fact, they often face equally negative reactions from their overweight peers.

Even though 94% of overweight children believe that weight-based stereotypes held by their peers were unfair and untrue, 90% reported that they believed that teasing would stop if they could lose weight. This suggests a high degree of internalization. Without support from their overweight peers, and constant prejudice from peers, teachers and parents, it is no surprise that overweight and obese children suffer from low self-esteem, and are more likely to develop psychosocial problems as adults than average weight children.



Studies show-

- 96% of overweight teen girls reported being targets of hurtful comments & social rejection.
- Even amongst preschoolers, negative stereotypes against overweight peers, such as being lazy and greedy, persisted, regardless of their own body weight.
- The amount of physical and verbal abuse correlates with the amount the child is overweight. That is, the more obese, the more likely they are to suffer bullying and other forms of victimization.
- Overweight girls received less financial support from their parents for college than their average weight counterparts, with similar grades in the same cultural & socio-economic group.

The Solution

The increase in childhood obesity results from children eating too much high-caloric food and spending too little time playing/exercising. Since the calories they ingest are greater than the calories they expend, the solution is obvious: **increase physical activity and reduce of high-caloric food**. The resulting weight loss and increased self-esteem will translate into stronger social and academic performances. The amount of teasing and bullying they experience will also decrease. With improved health, the chance of additional weight-related complications (like diabetes), that may exacerbate their social alienation, will be reduced.



Studies have shown that children's attitudes and subsequent levels of physical activity are directly correlated to their parents' attitudes and weight. Fifty-nine percent of Canadians are currently overweight or obese; therefore, the best way to help your children is by example -

- Choose a physical activity and **do it together**—eg take swimming lessons or buy a two-person bike
- **Choose a goal together** and work towards it- eg 10km race or a hiking expedition
- Cook meals together. Studies have long shown that families who **eat slow food** maintain healthier body weights, plus it will give you a chance to talk to your kids about how they are doing.
- Schedule free play time for the children. Reserve at least 30 minutes a day where children must play outside, and **be sure to join them**. Even playing with the dog in a park for 30 minutes will make all the difference.

If your child is struggling with obesity and is a victim of its social effects, contact your EFAP for support.

Your logo here

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Brown Crawshaw 1.800.668.2055
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