CHILDHOOD OBESITY

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Is your patient suffering the ill effects of having been overweight as a child? Perhaps, and perhaps you can assist young patients suffering from this epidemic and give them a happier, healthier future. Dr. Macy walks us through some of the disorders that this excessive pressure can cause and what can be done to treat them. This article is available for Continuing Education Unit (CEU) credit.

One of the most dangerous trends in today’s world is the epidemic of childhood obesity. The statistics are worrisome: more than a third of children and adolescents in the United States are overweight or obese, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). These children are more likely to have issues related to bone and joint development, high cholesterol and blood pressure, and mental wellness issues (CDC 2015).

The following are some of the foot health effects that childhood obesity can cause to our young ones:

Flat Feet:
While babies are born with feet which appear flat, much of this may be due to a natural fat pad under the arch. This tends to disappear by the age of 4, so it can be a challenge to determine whether there is a flat foot condition before this. Even

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so, there is a natural reduction in heel eversion from the stage of early walkers to 5-6 years old but obesity can prevent proper development of arches. Obese children have feet that must bear much more weight and therefore are flattened and widened out. They may experience foot pain along the bottom of the feet, including pain in the heel. Orthotics may help reduce pain and up until about the age of 9, some changes in structure can be obtained this way.

**Joint pain:**
Since children grow at faster rates during childhood than in young adulthood, misalignment in joints can grow into bigger issues that cause pain from the bottom to the top of the leg. Obese children’s weight can cause joints to slip out of place and grow incorrectly. As the misaligned joints try to bear the weight, it causes children pain.

**Blount’s Disease:**
This condition happens when there is a bowing of the legs and improper development of the ankles due to obesity. If spotted early enough in the child, the issue may be corrected with orthotics and therapy, but later on it would require stronger measures and possibly even surgery.

While it makes sense to many that being overweight causes arches to flatten, there is
ample evidence to point to the opposite: Flat feet lead to childhood obesity. Feet which flatten out to excess are unstable, ultimately resulting in inefficiency in walking and running gait. Children suffer from early fatigue and clumsiness, affecting their skills and potentially causing them to lose interest in these physical activities.

Whenever possible, it is best to address disease or other health issues as soon as they develop. In the case of childhood obesity, actions taken early will reduce the risk of poor health outcomes later in life. More immediately, the important factor to address is the fact that obesity can affect development and cause pain or deformity as your child grows.

Does your child have foot or ankle pain due to being overweight? Make a plan with your pediatrician to help him or her lose weight and eat right. When healthy foods and fun physical/aerobic activities are avoided, the body is more susceptible to injury, including strained muscle tissues and stress fractures. In addition, a podiatrist who specializes in children’s foot issues can help address their foot or ankle pain or deformity using orthotics. A pedorthist can facilitate their use by provide footwear that works with the orthoses. Providing well fit and properly selected footwear will also allow the pedorthist to aid in the treatment of this patient.

**JOINT PAIN**

Joint pain can range from mildly irritating to debilitating. It may go away after a few weeks (acute), or last for several weeks or months (chronic). Even short-term pain and swelling in the joints can affect quality of life. Whatever the cause of joint pain, it can usually managed with medication, physical therapy, or alternative treatments.

**BLOUNT’S DISEASE**

*Blount's disease* is a growth disorder of the tibia (shin bone) that causes the lower leg to angle inward, resembling a bowleg. It is also known as "tibia vara". It is named after Walter Putnam Blount (1900–1992), an American pediatric orthopedic surgeon.
Childhood obesity is a complex health issue. It occurs when a child is well above the normal or healthy weight for his or her age and height. The causes of excess weight gain in young people are similar to those in adults, including factors such as a person's behavior and genetics.

### Statistics

- **33%** Children and adolescents were overweight or obese
- **25%** Obese adults were obese in their childhood
- **30%** Kids eat some type of fast food everyday of the year
- **85%** Girls aged 12 - 19 don't take proper calcium in their diet

### Effects

Obesity during childhood can have a harmful effect on the body in a variety of ways. Children who have obesity are more likely to have but not limited to:

- Diabetes
- Cancer
- Heart Disease
- Stroke
- Sleep apnea
- Osteoarthritis

### Solutions

**Healthy Eating**

Some of the most important aspects of healthy eating are portion control and cutting down on how much fat and sugar your child eats or drinks. Simple ways to reduce fat intake in your child’s diet and promote a healthy weight include serving:

- Low-fat or nonfat dairy products
- Poultry without skin
- Lean cuts of meats
- Whole grain breads and cereals
- Healthy snacks such as fruit and veggies
- Reduce the amount of sugar sweetened drinks and salt in your child's diet.

**Physical Activity**

Children and adolescents should do 60 minutes (1 hour) or more of physical activity each day and include:

- Aerobic Activity
- Muscle Strengthening
- Bone Strengthening Exercises.

**Less Screen Time**

Cutting down to 2 hours a day can be hard for some children because TV may be such a large part of their daily routines. But you can help your children by telling them how sedentary activities affect their overall health. Talk to them about things they can do to be healthier. A few examples are:

- Remove the TV or computer from your child’s bedroom.
- DO NOT allow TV watching during meals or homework.
- DO NOT let your child eat while watching TV or using the computer.

**Sleep Full Night**

Healthy sleep requires:

- A sufficient amount of sleep
- Uninterrupted (good quality) sleep
- The proper number of age-appropriate naps
- A sleep schedule that is in sync with the child's natural biological rhythms (internal clock or circadian rhythm)

If, over time, any of these essentials are not optimal, symptoms of sleep deprivation may occur.