To: Local Media  
From: Lisa Cross, Health Educator  
RE: Childhood Obesity  
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Is Obesity Threatening the Health of Your Child?

As a society of super sized meals, video games and instant gratification, our children are becoming larger and larger. A child has traditionally been considered obese if they are more than 20% over their ideal body weight. That ideal weight must take into account the child’s height, age, gender and body build.

Results from a 2007-2008 National Health Nutrition Examination Survey, using measured heights and weights, indicate that an estimated 17% of children and adolescents are obese. The percentage of obese children in our country is steadily increasing.

Obesity is not a new phenomenon and is commonly associated through a combination of excessive dietary calories and lack of physical activity.

Overall, most people are aware of the physical, mental and emotional implications associated with carrying extra body weight. We can pick up a medical journal, along with popular magazines and review articles and research on childhood obesity.

Physical effects of childhood obesity
- Heart Disease
- Type 2 Diabetes
- Breathing difficulties during sleep
- Osteoarthritis
- Certain Cancers

Mental and emotional consequences of childhood obesity
- Depression
- Low Self-Esteem
- Social labeling as undesirable
- Anxiety
With obesity being the leading lifestyle related cause of preventable death in the United States, and an increasing prevalence in children; authorities view it as one of the most serious public-health problems of the 21st century. With that said, the problem is not the lack of published research on obesity and its implications. But rather, what do we do about this growing epidemic?

A healthy diet and physical activity program are the mainstays for treating childhood obesity. There are many negative contributing factors with respect to diet. However, two take the lead, low fiber intake and large consumption of energy-dense foods high in fat and sugar are the highest contributors to obesity.

With respect to a physical activity program, the American Heart Association recommends children over the age of 2 participate in at least 30 minutes of moderate intensity, developmentally appropriate physical activity everyday, if not 30 minutes in one session, then two fifteen minute sessions or three ten minute sessions daily.

**Tips for Diet**
- Plan meals—incorporate high fiber choices, add fiber supplements if doctor approved
- Eat slowly
- Control portion size—limit high sugar/fat food choices
- Drink plenty of water (at least eight 8-ounce glasses per day)
- Have healthy “snacking” ideas readily available
- Pack school lunches
- Do not eat on the run or in front of the television

**Tips for Mental/Emotional Well-being**
- Emphasize the child's strengths and positive qualities to build self-esteem
- Be a good role model
- Consult a professional at signs of depression

**Tips for a Physical Activity Program**
- As a parent be active with your child
- Make physical activity a game, have fun with it
- Place a limit on amount of time your child has with television and video games

Public awareness of childhood obesity is rising; many parents know the basic factors that contribute to obesity. Focus should be placed on assisting and teaching children to make positive choices with regard to food and behaviors that in-turn reduce health risks.
Information for this article was retrieved from American Heart Association and the National Institutes of Health. For more information on childhood obesity visit the CDC website at http://www.cdc.gov/obesity/childhood/index.html.

This article is brought to you by the staff at Central Michigan District Health Department, which serves residents in the counties of Arenac, Clare, Gladwin, Isabella, Osceola and Roscommon. Visit our website at www.cmdhd.org

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