



FAST FACTS



Obesity in Early Life

OBESITY is a complex chronic disease in which abnormal or excessive accumulation of body fat impairs health. Adult obesity rates have more than doubled since the 1980s — in the U.S. today, obesity affects over 42% of adults and 18% of youth.¹ Obesity and its related complications are major drivers of rising healthcare costs, diminished health-related quality of life, and the recent decline in U.S. life expectancy. This fact sheet is part of a series designed to provide basic information about the science of obesity and current strategies to address it.

The Prevalence of Pediatric Obesity

The U.S. pediatric obesity rate among children aged 2 to 19 years old has risen to 18.5%, compared to 10% in the early nineties.² Disparities exist based on sex, race, and age.

- The most at-risk groups are:²
 - Adolescents, with an obesity rate of 20.6%
 - Black girls, with an obesity rate of 25.1%
 - Hispanic boys, with an obesity rate of 28.0%
- The prevalence of severe obesity in children has also increased significantly in the past few decades, with serious consequences. Compared to youth with moderate obesity, those with severe obesity are more likely to suffer from:³
 - Type 2 diabetes
 - Fatty liver disease
 - Hypertension

Risk Factors for Childhood Obesity

There is a strong correlation between the weight of parents and the weight of their children.⁴ Shared environment, genetics, intrauterine effects, and learned behaviors can all contribute to the intergenerational transmission of obesity.

- In a recent study, researchers found that the three factors that best predicted the development of childhood obesity in their sample were:⁵
 - Higher child BMI
 - Higher maternal BMI
 - Lower maternal education
- Another study identified these early life risk factors as contributing to childhood obesity:⁶
 - Parental obesity
 - Birth weight
 - Weight at 8 months, 18 months, and 1 year
 - Short sleep duration (<10.5 hours) at age 3
 - Over eight hours of TV time per week at age 3

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Pediatric obesity, including severe pediatric obesity, has risen over the past few decades, putting children at risk of serious complications.
- Parental weight is strongly correlated with child weight and childhood weight is strongly correlated with adult weight, especially in cases of severe obesity.
- Children and adolescents deserve access to a wide range of safe and effective obesity treatments.

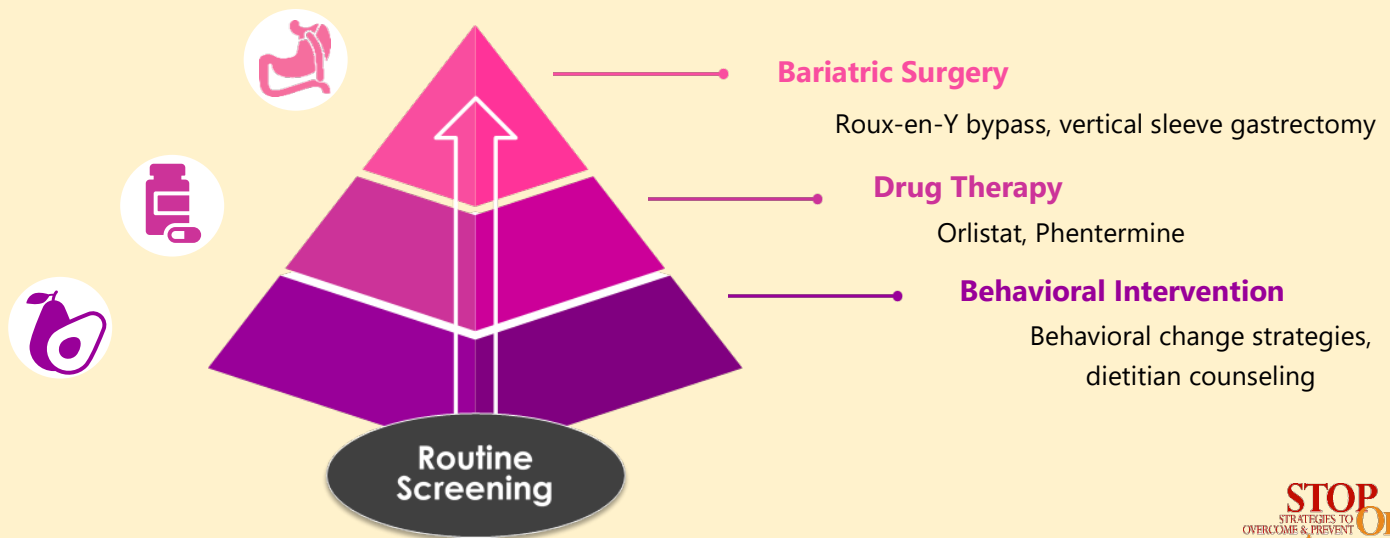
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Weigh In: Talking to Your Children About Weight and Health



Treating Childhood Obesity

Many of the obesity treatments available to adults are also available to children. However, only **two medications** have FDA approval for use in adolescents⁷ and **over half** of adolescents seeking surgical interventions for obesity were initially denied insurance coverage for the procedure because they were under the age of eighteen.⁸



Obesity into Adulthood

Many children with obesity grow into adults with obesity. Those who have obesity in their youth are five times more likely to have obesity in adulthood than their healthy weight peers.⁹

- Severe obesity predicts future obesity:
 - Children with severe obesity at 2 years of age have an 80% chance of having obesity as an adult. This risk goes up to 90% for children with severe obesity at the age of 5¹⁰
 - One longitudinal study found that all of the child participants with BMIs at or above the 99th percentile had obesity as adults¹¹
- Researchers have estimated that about 57% of those who are currently between the ages of 2 and 19 will have obesity by the time they reach the age of 35, with about half of the cases beginning in childhood.¹⁰

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