



Understanding Pediatric Overweight and Obesity

Helping Kids Grow Up Healthy:
Understanding Weight With Kindness



Weight is just one part of a child's overall health. Many factors influence how children grow – and families deserve compassionate, clear information.

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, **1 in 5 U.S. children and teens** have obesity. Weight can affect health now and in adulthood, so early support makes a big difference. But it's important to approach this topic with **understanding, not blame**.

Key Things to Know

1. Obesity is complex. It's never as simple as “eating too much.” Many factors play a role:

- Genetics
- Environment
- Activity levels
- Access to healthy foods
- How the body uses energy
- Family routines and stress



2. Every child is different. Kids grow at different rates and have different body shapes. There is no single “right” size.

3. It's not about willpower. A child is not “lazy.” Weight is influenced by biology, environment, and emotional health.

4. Food and energy matter. What we eat, how much we eat, and how our bodies use energy all influence weight.



What Is BMI?

BMI (Body Mass Index) is one tool doctors use to understand growth patterns.

- It compares a child's height and weight to others of the same age and sex.
- It helps identify possible concerns such as overweight or obesity.
- It's **not** the whole picture – providers also look at growth charts, eating habits, activity levels, and overall health.



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How Families Can Support Healthy Growth

You don't need perfect habits - just small, sustainable changes.

- Focus on **healthy behaviors**, not the scale
- Offer balanced meals and snacks
- Encourage fun movement (not punishment exercise)
- Keep a routine around meals and sleep
- Avoid shaming language about weight
- Reach out to your UPMC CCP pediatric provider with questions - we're here to support your whole family

Remember...healthy growth is a journey, not a number. With compassion, structure, and support, families can help kids feel strong, confident, and healthy.

