

Are you worried about your child's weight?

“Dear Lynda

My Grandson is really chubby or I suppose I should say fat for his age. He is only 10 and already his weight is slowing him down. I am very concerned about his future health and not sure how to handle the situation as my daughter-in-law does not like me to interfere. Please help.”

The fact is that in this country we do have a major problem with over weight and obese children. The statistics are very worrying; 1 out of 4 children who are obese at age 6 will be obese as an adult, and three out of four at age 12 will be obese adults with all the associated health implications of high blood pressure, heart disease and diabetes.

Many parents do not want to accept or acknowledge that their child is overweight because they feel guilty or perhaps they are overweight themselves and do not realise how serious it is for a child. You are in a difficult situation because although you are worried and want to help, the reality is that your son and his wife need to take control of this situation and you must be careful you do not alienate yourself from them. Gentle suggestions may be your only course of action.

If a parent is concerned that their child is overweight they should first take them to their own GP. There are measurements a doctor can take to confirm whether a child is overweight or obese. Your doctor will usually check the body mass index (BMI) which is the best indication of whether your child is overweight or obese. A child is obese if their weight is more than 20% higher than the ideal weight for a boy or girl of their age and height.

Only this week in the press there has been the controversy concerning whether a parent is responsible for the weight of their child. My opinion is that of course the parent is responsible especially for children under the age of 12. Children learn a lot by example so as a parent it is vital that you teach your children about how to eat healthily. I would urge any mother to realise the importance of cooking fresh food at home and encourage your children by letting them help with the preparation of meals – make it fun not a chore. Provide lots of fresh fruit and vegetables, and variety in the meals you cook which makes them more interesting and less likely to be rejected.

With very young children keep offering different foods even if they are rejected the first time. It is essential to be relaxed yourself around mealtimes and never force children to eat what they do not want but also if they do not eat what is offered do not follow up with sweets and pudding as treats e.g. say “if you don't eat your dinner you don't get your pudding”! The major problem with children today is that they are addicted to sugar and I blame food manufacturers who hide



sugar in many products so read food labels. Do you know that there is over one teaspoon of sugar in every tablespoon of tomato ketchup and eight teaspoons in a fizzy drink!

Please do not ignore the problem, if you think your child is overweight or obese make the decision to change their diet from today. Create good habits for your family by encouraging a healthy diet of fresh fruit and vegetables, control portion sizes, and ensure plenty of activity. Do not buy processed food or fizzy drinks and do not use sweets as treats but find healthy alternatives. Please contact me if you would like further advice.

Lynda Beetham

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