Parent Guide to Child Healthy Weight Programs

In the past 4 decades, the number of children in the US with obesity has more than tripled.

Some children are at higher risk, such as those from lower-income and socially disadvantaged households and those from rural areas. If your child has obesity, their physician should offer or refer your child to receive comprehensive intensive behavioral interventions. These programs involve the whole family, help support a healthier weight for your child, and improve health and well-being.

Comprehensive means that the program focuses on several different health behaviors. For example, your family may learn ways to eat a healthy diet, be more active, limit time spent sitting or looking at screens, and improve sleep. You will learn ways to help make these changes easier such as setting goals and planning routines.

Intensive means you will have regular support. Interventions with at least 26 total hours with a clinician throughout 2 to 12 months have been shown to improve weight.

Behavioral means your family will have help to turn newly learned healthy behaviors into habits by practicing in all the places your child learns and plays, including at home, school, and in the community. Your family will learn how to involve other family members and friends to support new healthy habits.

Parents play an important role in supporting the whole family to make healthy choices. You will learn how to model healthy behaviors for your child, help to solve problems, and make healthy choices easy in the home. Be an advocate for your child. Ask if they are teased or bullied by friends, teachers, health care professionals, or family members. Take appropriate action. Do not make comments about your child’s shape or weight and ask others to do the same.

These interventions are safe and effective for 2 important reasons: (1) a team of clinicians will help your child achieve a healthy weight or prevent excess weight gain based on their stage of growth and (2) your child will have support from the whole family to make lifestyle changes at home, at school, and in the community. Children who participate in these kinds of programs show improvements in social emotional health and physical health.

Some children may try to lose weight on their own, which is not recommended. Watch out for the following warning signs, and discuss with your child’s physician immediately: losing weight too quickly, hiding food or eating in secret, binge eating (eating a lot and feeling that one cannot stop), vomiting or using things to make them go to the bathroom to lose weight, overexercising to burn off calories, and skipping regular meals.

Talk to your child’s physician or visit the Obesity Action Coalition to find out more information on how to access programs in your community.

FOR MORE INFORMATION
- https://www.obesityaction.org
- https://ihcw.aap.org/Pages/Resources_ParentPt.aspx

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