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Protecting your children against type 2 diabetes
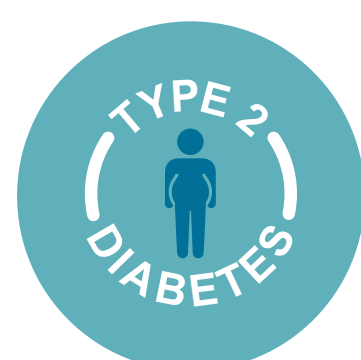
TYPE 2 DIABETES

14.2% of SA primary school children = OVERWEIGHT

South African children are at a high risk of developing some type 2 diabetes, which is when the body doesn't respond to insulin as well as it should. Type 1 diabetes is when the body doesn't produce insulin.

IT'S ESTIMATED THAT BY 2025:

123 000
South African children will have pre-diabetes which can develop into type 2 diabetes.

68 000
South African children will be diagnosed with overt diabetes - the advanced stage of diabetes.

With childhood obesity becoming a more prevalent health issue, parents need to understand the **long-term impact that obesity can have on their child's welfare,** and how to prevent it.

DIABETES RISK FACTORS

The below factors all increase a child's risk of developing type 2 diabetes:

• Being overweight
• Low physical activity
• Gender – girls are more likely to develop type 2 diabetes
• Family history of diabetes
• Race – people of Indian and African descent face a higher risk
• Being born premature
• Have a mother with gestational diabetes

PREVENTION

The major risk factors for childhood diabetes are obesity and lack of physical activity. Both can be addressed by encouraging children to adopt healthier lifestyle habits.

Healthy snacking

When it comes to snacks, children often snack on unhealthy foods. Here are just a few snack options to offer as tasty alternatives:

• Fresh low-GI veggies and fruits: apples, avocados, bananas and cucumbers
• Nuts and seeds
• Grilled veggies
• Plain yoghurt
• Celery with peanut butter
• Sugar free oat cookies
• Kale chips
• Substitute soft drinks for water.

Cut back on digital screen time

Children can spend a lot of time in front of their screens which increases their risk for obesity, as excessive screen time results in inactivity. Children also snack more and it doesn't help that many television advertisements encourage children to purchase foods high in calories and sugar and low in nutrients. Excessive screen time can also affect sleep patterns and increase the risk of obesity.

Limit how much time your children spend in front of a screen to no more than 2 hours a day. Your kids won't cut back on their screen time if you don't. Install an app that will help you monitor device usage.

Eat more home-cooked meals

Research has found that there's a lower risk of childhood obesity amongst children who eat healthy home-cooked meals. Invite your children to cook with you. They are also more likely to eat healthier food if they see and understand how it's prepared.

Stay active

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends that children aged between 5 and 17 years old partake in at least 60 minutes of moderate or vigorous physical activity every day.

In addition to cutting back on their screen time, parents can keep their children active in the following ways:
• Encourage daily household chores
• Sign them up for school clubs
• Play ball games or other active games like tag or jump rope

When it comes to the health of our children, it's important for parents to lead by example. Children do as they see, not always as they're told, so parents should adopt healthy habits too.

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