

YOUR CARE POLMED

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Is your child too young to be diabetic?



In South Africa, **14.2% of primary school children** are already overweight. If the current obesity rate continues to rise, **3.91 million school children will be overweight or obese by 2025.**

This trend will result in:

- 123 000 children with impaired glucose tolerance (pre-diabetes)
- 68 000 children with overt diabetes (advanced stage)
- 460 000 children with high blood pressure
- 637 000 with first stage fatty liver disease

Childhood obesity in South Africa is fuelling the increasing trend of type 2 diabetes and other health problems in children. Parents need to understand the impact that bad diet and poor activity habits have on their child's long-term health.



Signs and symptoms of type 2 diabetes in children

If your child has type 2 diabetes, they may exhibit the following symptoms:

- Increased thirst
- Frequent urination
- Fatigue
- Blurry vision
- Weight loss
- Darkened areas of skin (often around the neck or in the armpits)
- Slow wound healing

Undiagnosed childhood diabetes

If your child is overweight or obese, and/or they begin to exhibit the above signs and symptoms, your child must be screened for diabetes by your family doctor or by a nurse at the local clinic/pharmacy.

Undiagnosed childhood diabetes can cause the following complications:

- Heart disease and stroke in later life
- High blood pressure
- High cholesterol
- Eye damage
- Nerve damage
- Kidney damage and failure
- Amputation

Prevention



The most common causes of childhood obesity include a lack of physical activity and overeating. Parents need to help their children maintain a healthy weight, which can then reduce their risks for both childhood obesity and diabetes.



1. Healthy eating

You need to ensure your child's diet contains healthy, balanced food. For snacks and lunch boxes, you should opt for the following:

- Choose fresh fruit rather than packaged chips, fruit rolls/dried fruit and cereal bars.
- Choose plain yoghurt over sugar-rich flavoured yoghurt.
- Choose unflavoured water over soda, flavoured water and sweet drinks. Flavour water yourself with some berries or cucumber and mint.
- Choose brown or whole grain over white bread and change between rolls, pitas and bread to keep your child's interest.
- Choose nut spread or egg instead of chocolate or jam spreads.



2. Physical activity

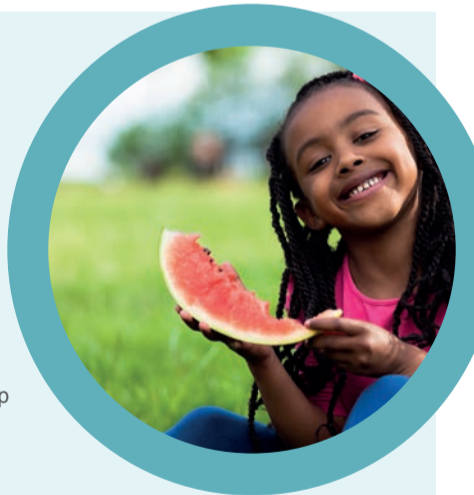
The World Health Organization recommends that children aged between 5 and 17 years old need to have at least 60 minutes of moderate or vigorous physical activity every day.

It would be best if you encourage your children to be more active. A good start is by limiting recreational screen time, which includes TV, cellphone, computer and tablet use, to no more than 2 hours a day.

Formal recreation or sporting activities are excellent, but there are other ways for children to be active. These include:

- Helping your children be more active around the house. Helping with household chores, playing with your pets in the yard or participating in age-appropriate online exercise classes are good ways to get children moving.
- Playing active games with them in the yard or indoors such as hide and seek, jump rope, ball games, sprint races, and tag.

You can create opportunities for your children to be healthy. It is also essential to lead by example, by making healthy food and lifestyle choices for your family. In this way, childhood type 2 diabetes can be avoided.



References:

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