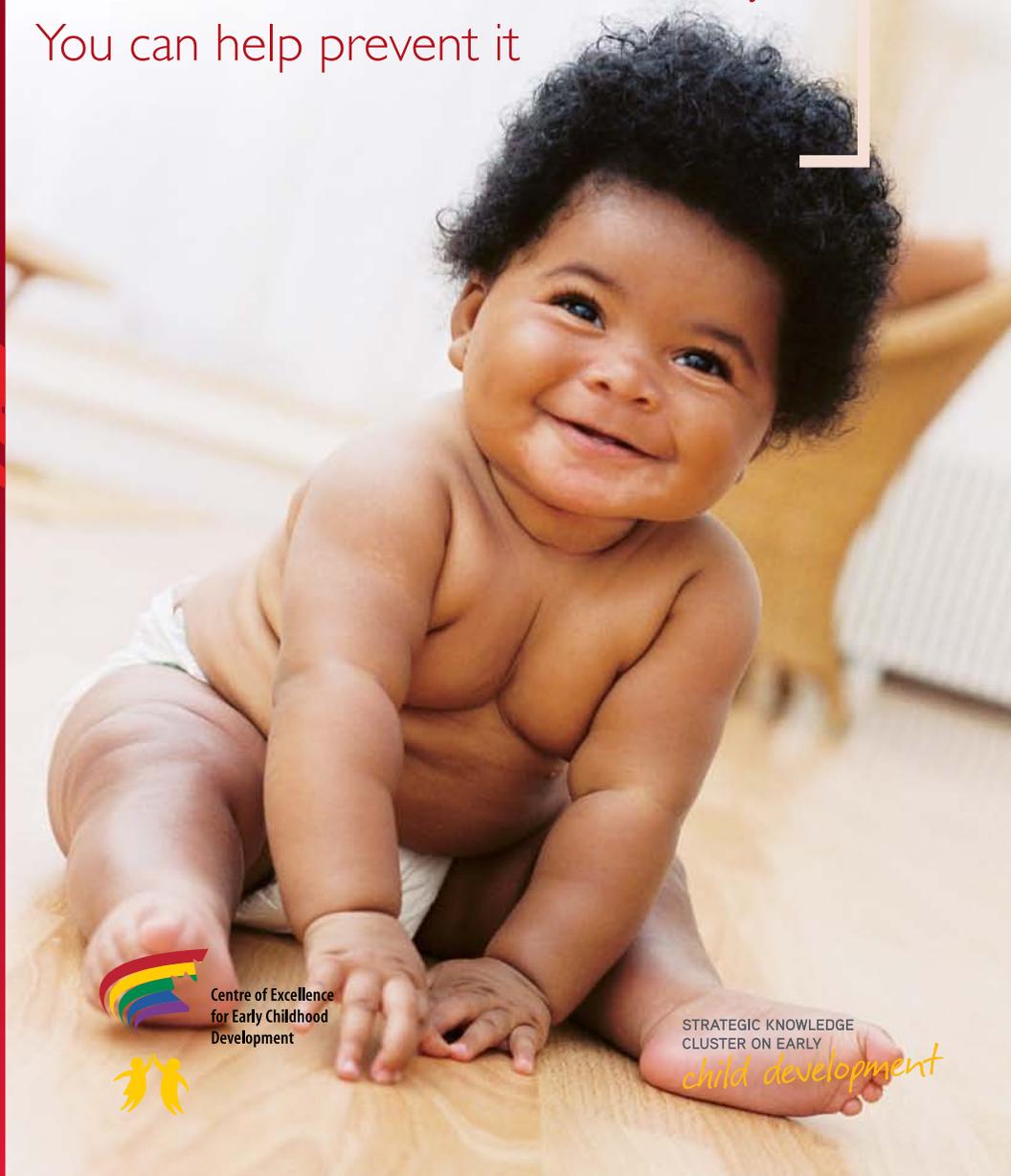


Eyes on



# Childhood Obesity

You can help prevent it



PARENTS



Centre of Excellence  
for Early Childhood  
Development



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**“Children who become obese tend to stay obese into their teens and adult years.”**

## What do we know?

- A child who is overweight has an excess of weight while a child who is obese has an excess of body fat.
- Being obese can cause negative effects by:
  - adding to health problems (for example, diabetes, asthma, high blood pressure) and shortening a person’s lifespan.
  - disrupting normal development.
  - adding to social problems (for example, obese people may be discriminated against, victimized or isolated).
- Mothers who gain too much weight, smoke and develop diabetes while they are pregnant are more at risk of having obese children.
- Breastfeeding children for at least 12 months helps protect them against obesity in childhood and teen years.
- Children who become obese tend to stay obese into their teens and adult years.
- Children’s social environment, genes and/or their mother’s health (for example, if she is obese) influence whether or not they will become obese.
- Most young overweight and obese children grow up in an environment that promotes activities that aren’t physical (for example, watching TV) and large amounts of food intake.
- Overweight and obesity can happen when more energy is taken in (for example, food and drinks) than is used by the body.
- Young children who regularly eat cheap, high-calorie food (for example, fast food and sodas) are more likely to become overweight or obese.
- Children who don’t get enough sleep are more likely to be unhealthy, have poor eating habits and gain weight.
  - They usually are less active and find it harder to take part in active play.
  - Hormones that stimulate appetite are more active in children who don’t get enough sleep.
- Overweight and obese children tend to eat quickly and find it hard to know when they are full.
- Eating behaviours are influenced by genes and are reinforced by parenting. Parents encourage their young children to be physically active when they play with them. They can also help by controlling the type and amount of food their young children eat.

## Paying attention to...

## What can be done?

... how healthy you are before and while you are pregnant.

- Maintain a healthy weight and don't smoke before and during pregnancy.
- Consult your doctor to screen for diabetes during your pregnancy.

... what your child eats.

- If possible, breastfeed exclusively for the first six months and continue breastfeeding for at least one year.
- Offer your child a variety of healthy foods beginning around six months.
- Avoid letting your child see too much unhealthy food and drink advertising.
- Avoid giving snacks before bedtime.
- Try not to use food to soothe your child when he's upset (unless he's upset because he's hungry).

... how your child eats.

- Follow your baby's cues: he will let you know when he is hungry and when he is full.
- Encourage your child to eat slowly.
- Don't pressure your child to finish his plate when he is full.

... how much sleep your child gets.

- Make sure your child sleeps enough for his age (see: information sheet [Sleeping behaviour: Good sleep, for good growth](#)).

... how physically active your child is.

- Give your child lots of opportunities to play outdoors.
- Encourage your child to be active by spending time playing with him.
- Set rules to be sure your child isn't getting too much "screen time."
  - A good guideline is to limit him to less than 2 hours per day of TV and using computers and other electronics.
  - Turn the TV off during the day.

... what your child weighs.

- Make sure your doctor regularly checks your child for overweight and rapid weight gain.



## Information

This information sheet is a publication of the Centre of Excellence for Early Childhood Development (CEECD) and the Strategic Knowledge Cluster on Early Child Development (SKC-ECD). These organizations identify and summarize the best scientific work on early childhood development. They disseminate this knowledge to a variety of audiences in formats and languages adapted to their needs.

For a more in-depth understanding of Obesity, consult our synthesis and experts' articles on this topic in the Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development, available free of charge at [www.child-encyclopedia.com](http://www.child-encyclopedia.com).

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In this document, the masculine form is used merely to simplify the text. No discrimination is intended.

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