

# When Your Child's Weight is Ahead of Height

All children have their own pattern of growth. Growth should be monitored over time to see what your child's pattern is.

Children grow the fastest when they are babies. During preschool and the early school years, they grow more slowly. At puberty, when their bodies start changing, they start to grow faster again.

It is important to measure children's weight and height at least once a year to make sure that they are growing in a healthy way.

## Boys and Girls Grow Differently

Girls usually mature earlier than boys. Some girls will mature at earlier ages than other girls just as some boys will mature earlier than other boys.

Adolescence is a time when girls will gain more fat tissue and add fat stores on their thighs, breasts, and hips. In boys, the weight gain is mostly from muscle gain. Knowing that these body changes will happen can help reassure children that they are growing as they should. Children who mature early tend to need more support.

Children can be very sensitive about their changing bodies. A parent's support has a positive influence on healthy growth.

**Never** put children on a calorie/energy restricted diet without medical supervision.

**Do not** put children on a strict exercise program.

## When Weight Gets Ahead of Height

Proper weight gain is needed to make sure that children reach the height they are meant to be.

Sometimes weight can get ahead of height. Weight spurts, just as height spurts, are part of normal growth. A spurt is a sudden increase in weight or height. In some children, weight spurts happen before height spurts. Other children just gain more weight than they need for their height. This is how children become overweight.

Body Mass Index (BMI)-for-Age compares **weight to height**. It is used to assess children's growth and show how their body is changing.

Parents, family members, and friends can all help a child who is at risk of or has become overweight. Through your words and actions you can show that having fun while being active, eating healthy foods, and feeling good about yourself are all part of a healthy lifestyle. The next page has information and tips to help children grow into their weight.

The goal is to slow the rate your child gains weight while making sure your child is still growing taller. We want children to grow as tall as they were meant to. Growing into weight may happen very slowly.

Ask your nurse, doctor, or dietitian how often to weigh and measure your child.

## Healthy Lifestyle Tips

Help your child to grow into his or her weight while enjoying a healthy lifestyle along with the whole family. Here are some tips to help your child form life long healthy habits.

### Healthy Eating

- Children copy their parents. By enjoying healthy foods you are teaching your child to enjoy them as well.
- Offer healthy foods to satisfy hunger. Include choices from the four food groups in Canada's Food Guide: Vegetables & Fruits, Grain Products, Milk & Alternatives, and Meat & Alternatives.
- Eat together as a family as often as possible. This is a great chance to encourage your child to try new foods and to spend time together.
- At meals and snacks, serve the same healthy foods to the whole family.
- Offer a meal or snack every 2 to 3 hours, so your child does not get too hungry in between meal/snack times.
- Offer water regularly throughout the day.
- Encourage children to follow their body's cues of hunger and fullness and learn to stop eating when they are comfortably full.
- Limit distractions while eating. Try not to combine eating with other activities such as reading or screen time. This lets children pay better attention to their body's cues.
- Limit snacks and desserts that are high in fat or sugar. Offer the same choices to the whole family.
- Foods should not be used to bribe, punish, or reward.
- Pack healthy snacks, meals, and drinks rather than buying them while you are out. If you do eat out, remember that serving sizes are often too big.

### Active Living

- Children copy their parents. Make regular physical activities a fun part of your family life.
- Give children time to be active. Limit sedentary behaviours, like watching television, and using computers or other electronics to no more than 2 hours a day.
- Encourage children to play outdoors whenever possible. Get the whole family involved. Try ball games, running games, skipping, or try making up your own games.

### Body Image

- Be a positive role model for your child. Appreciate your body for what it is and what it can do. Try not to make comments about yourself or others about size or shape.
- Make your home a place where everyone knows that people and health matter—not body size.
- Boost children's self-esteem by noticing all their special talents and strengths. For example, being loveable, friendly, artistic, or a good writer.
- Build a positive relationship with your child. Encourage children to share their interests in school, activities, hobbies, and friendships.

### For More Information

Visit the websites below for healthy eating and active living resources:

- [www.healthyparentshealthychildren.ca](http://www.healthyparentshealthychildren.ca)
- [www.raisingourhealthykids.com](http://www.raisingourhealthykids.com)
- [www.healthyeatingstartshere.ca](http://www.healthyeatingstartshere.ca)
- Canada's Food Guide:  
[www.healthcanada.gc.ca/foodguide](http://www.healthcanada.gc.ca/foodguide)

Contact your local health centre to learn about the other places to go for more help in your community.