

Patient information from BMJ

Last published: Dec 06, 2021

Weight problems in children: changing unhealthy habits

Reaching and maintaining a healthy weight can be very difficult for some children. They need a lot of help and encouragement. They may also have lost confidence in themselves because of worrying about their weight, or being teased about it.

Some children benefit from seeing a counsellor about their weight. A counsellor might help the child to:

- Understand more about food and a healthy diet
- Set goals to eat more healthily
- Decide how to increase the amount of exercise they do
- Solve problems (for example, work out how to deal with situations when they are tempted to go back to unhealthy habits)
- Increase their confidence, so they feel better about themselves and their bodies.

Families can also help a lot with this. If all the family agrees to the same rules (for example, not eating snacks in front of the television, or always going for a family bike ride at the weekend) then it's easier for the child to stick to them.

It's important that the child's parents understand what the child needs to do, and help the child to do it. This might involve helping the child avoid temptation, by not having unhealthy snack foods or sugary drinks in the house, or by unplugging the television so it's harder to switch on. It might also involve having plenty of healthy food available, and suggesting alternative activities to watching the television, such as doing crafts or playing games.

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