

# OVERWEIGHT: PREVENTION IN INFANTS

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## DEFINITION

An overweight baby is one with a weight gain far out of proportion to height gain. An overweight baby looks fat. Such a baby is not necessarily a healthy one. The infants who continue to be overweight as children and adults usually have parents, siblings, or grandparents who are overweight. Any infant with a strong family tendency toward obesity needs help. Overfeeding teaches a child to overeat. Some physicians wait until such a child shows signs of being overweight before making any alterations in the diet, but prevention is easier than treatment.

## DIETARY PRECAUTIONS TO PREVENT AN EXCESSIVE WEIGHT GAIN IN INFANTS

If someone in your family has a problem with easy weight gain, consider the following dietary precautions to prevent your baby from becoming overweight. If your child is already overweight, these guidelines will also be helpful. The goal for growing children is always slowing the rate of weight gain (not weight loss).

- From the beginning, try to teach your child to stop eating before she reaches a point of satiation. Help her stop before she has a sense of complete fullness and a reluctance to eat another bite. When she closes her mouth, turns her head, or wants to play, she's losing interest in feeding.
- Try to breast-feed. Breast-fed babies tend to be lighter in weight.
- If you are breast-feeding, avoid grazing. Grazing is nursing at frequent intervals, sometimes hourly. Such infants learn to eat when they are upset and to use food as a stress reliever.
- If you are bottle-feeding, don't allow your child to keep a bottle as a companion during the day or night. Children who are allowed to carry a bottle around with them learn to eat frequently and use food as a comforting device.
- Don't feed your baby every time she cries. Most crying babies want to be held and cuddled or may be thirsty and just need some water.
- Also teach your infant to use human contact (rather than food) to relieve stress and discomfort.
- Don't assume a sucking baby is hungry. Your baby may just want a pacifier or help with finding her thumb. Also, don't use teething biscuits or other foods in place of a teething ring.
- Don't insist that your baby finish every bottle. Unless your baby is underweight, she knows how much formula she needs.
- Don't enlarge the hole in the nipple of a baby bottle. The formula will come out of the bottle too fast.
- Feed your infant no more often than every 2 hours at birth and no more often than every 3 hours from 2 to 6 months of age.
- Feed your child slowly rather than rapidly. Don't do anything to hurry your child's pace of eating. It takes 15 to 20 minutes for the sensation of fullness to develop. The rapid-eating habit in adults has been associated with obesity.
- Avoid solids until your child is 4 months old (6 months old in breast-fed babies).
- Change to three meals daily by 6 months of age.

- Don't insist that your child clean her plate or finish a jar of baby food.
- Don't encourage your child to eat more after she signals she is full by turning her head or not opening her mouth.
- Discontinue breast- and bottle-feeding by 12 months of age. A study by Dr. W. S. Agras found that delayed weaning was associated with more obesity.
- Avoid sweets until at least 12 months of age.
- Don't give your child food as a way to distract her or keep her occupied. Instead, give her something to play with when you need some free time.
- Use praise and physical contact instead of food as a reward for good behavior.

**Caution:** Also don't underfeed your infant. Don't put your baby on low-fat milk or skim milk before 2 years of age. Your baby's brain is growing rapidly and needs the fat content of whole milk. While overfeeding is more common than underfeeding in infancy, underfeeding is more harmful.



## **CALL OUR OFFICE**

*During regular hours if*

- You are uncertain whether your infant is overweight.
- You are concerned about your infant's weight gain.