



## Childhood Overweight in Delaware: How We Can Help Delaware's Kids Grow Up Healthier

### A National Epidemic

Childhood overweight has become a national epidemic. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the percentage of overweight youth has tripled in the past 25 years (CDC, 2006). If these trends continue, the CDC predicts that our current generation of children may be the first ever to have a shorter projected lifespan than their parents.

### Who's At Risk in Delaware?

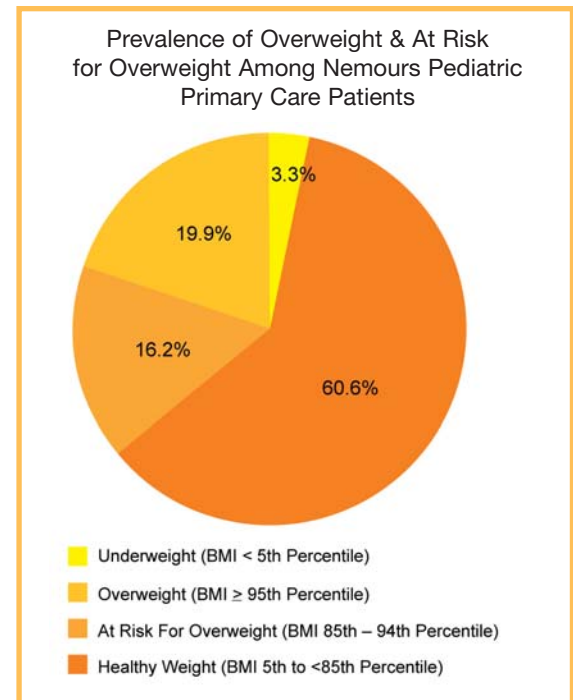
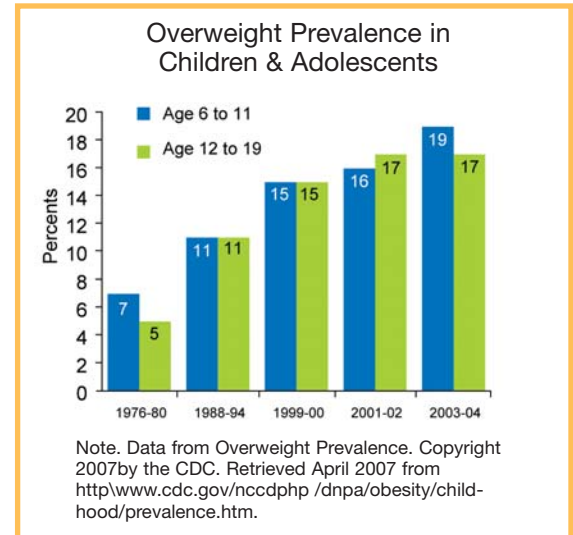
Childhood overweight affects every community in Delaware, with approximately 36% of our children and youth either overweight or at risk of being overweight (Nemours, 2005). This epidemic has a significant impact on the state's economy as well, currently costing Delaware at least \$207 million in medical expenditures every year (Finkelstein, Fiebelkorn, & Wang, 2004).

### What Are the Health Consequences of Childhood Overweight?

The health consequences of childhood overweight are profound, and Delaware kids who are overweight are at greater risk of suffering significant health problems as they grow older, including

- Type 2 Diabetes:** More Delaware kids who are overweight have Type 2 diabetes than kids who are not (Nemours, 2005). The CDC estimates that if childhood overweight continues to rise, one in three children born in the year 2000 will develop diabetes during their lifetime (Narayan, Boyle, Thompson, Sorensen, & Williamson, 2003).
- Risks associated with cardiovascular disease, such as high blood pressure and abnormal cholesterol:** Overweight kids in Delaware are three times more likely to have hypertension than their normal weight peers (Nemours, 2005). Furthermore, research indicates that approximately 60% of overweight children ages 5-10 have at least one cardiovascular disease risk factor, while 25% of overweight children have two or more cardiovascular risk factors (Freedman, Dietz, Srinivasan, & Berenson, 1999).
- Asthma:** Kids in Delaware who are overweight are more likely to have asthma compared to kids who are not overweight (Nemours, 2005). In addition, there is evidence that overweight children with asthma use more medicine, wheeze more, and make more visits to emergency rooms than their non-overweight peers with asthma (Belamarich et al., 2000).

Additional health problems that are associated with childhood overweight include certain types of cancers, sleep apnea, fatty liver disease, and mental health problems such as anxiety and depression. There are also academic consequences of childhood overweight, as evidence shows an association that children who eat poorly and are inactive tend to have weaker academic performance and lower scores on standardized achievement tests (Action for Healthy Kids, 2004).



# Planting the seeds for better health.

## How Did This Happen?

Why are so many of Delaware's children and youth already at risk for long-term chronic health problems? There are many factors, but the primary reasons are that kids

- *Do not eat enough fruits and vegetables.* According to the CDC, approximately 84% of Delaware students report that they did not eat the recommended five servings of fruits and vegetables per day (CDC, 2005).
- *Spend too much time in front of the television or computer screen.* In Delaware, more than 60% of overweight children and youth watch TV for two or more hours per day (Nemours, 2005).
- *Do not engage in enough exercise or other forms of physical activity.* More than 60% of overweight high school students in Delaware state that they participate in physical activity two days or less per week (Nemours, 2005). In addition, a 2005 survey indicates that 53% of Delaware youth did not participate in a physical education class (CDC, 2005).
- *Consume too many soft drinks and other sugary beverages.* Between 56% and 85% of school-age children consume at least one soft drink daily. Of this group, 20% consume four or more servings daily (Gleason & Suito, 2001).

## What Can You Do?

Adults can start by helping to create an environment that supports healthy behaviors in the places where kids live, learn, and play. Nemours Health and Prevention Services has developed the *5-2-1-Almost None* prescription for a healthy lifestyle. We believe that every child in Delaware should

- Eat 5 or more servings of fruits and vegetables each day
- Reduce screen time (watching TV, playing video games, using the computer) to no more than 2 hours per day.
- Engage in at least 1 hour of physical activity per day.
- Limit added sugars—specifically soft drinks, fruit drinks, and sports drinks—to two or fewer servings per week.



By following these basics of healthy eating and physical activity, Delaware's children can become the healthiest in the nation.

For more information on what you can do to make Delaware's kids the healthiest in the nation, please contact NHPS at 1-888-494-5252 or visit us at [www.GrowUpHealthy.org](http://www.GrowUpHealthy.org).

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