

## A global trend: childhood obesity

Childhood obesity is one of the most serious global public health challenges of the 21st century, with the number of overweight children under the age of five estimated to be over 41 million in 2016.<sup>1</sup>

There are many ways to measure obesity, but the most common is Body Mass Index (BMI). This is a number calculated by dividing a person's weight in kilograms by his or her height in meters squared. In the case of children, obesity is then assessed based on weight-for-age percentiles.

Childhood obesity is also becoming more common in developing countries, growing at a rate more than 30 percent higher than that of developed countries. If current trends continue the number of overweight or obese infants and young children globally will increase to 70 million by 2025.<sup>2</sup>

The most common reasons that children become overweight or obese are genetic factors, lack of physical activity, unhealthy eating patterns, or a combination of all of these factors. Pediatric weight issues are rarely caused by actual medical conditions.

### Risks associated with childhood obesity

Children who are considered affected by obesity are 70 percent more likely to continue being affected by obesity into adulthood. In addition, overweight children are at greater risk for serious medical issues, such as:

- Heart disease and strokes
- High cholesterol
- High blood pressure
- Diabetes
- Gallbladder disease
- Sleep apnea
- Cancer

In addition, children who are affected by obesity can also face social attitudes that can lead to low self-esteem and depression.

If your child is overweight, you should talk to your family physician about next steps for confronting the issue. If you have concerns about an obesity related diagnosis or medical uncertainty, you can rely on your Best Doctors benefit to provide a clear, in-depth review of your medical case by a world-renowned expert.

<sup>1</sup><http://www.who.int/dietphysicalactivity/childhood/en/>

<sup>2</sup><http://www.who.int/end-childhood-obesity/facts/en/>

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