

Tips and Strategies for Families to Begin to Overcome the Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Childhood Obesity

Influencing Factors and Intervention Tips and Strategies	Resources
1. Genetics, Biology, Physiology	USDA Resources https://www.nutrition.gov/topics/basic-nutrition/printable-materials-and-handouts https://www.nutrition.gov/es/temas/nutricion-basica/folletos-y-listas-de-materiales-para-imprimir
<p>Among African Americans and Hispanics, scientists have identified genetic, biological, and physiological differences that may, in some way, explain or help understand some of the differences in weight gain when compared to their White or Caucasian peers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Be aware that there are factors that may be beyond your control. This makes “changing what you can change” and establishing healthy habits early in life even more important and empowering. 	
2. Mother’s Weight Pre and During Pregnancy	
<p>Children born to women with pre-pregnancy obesity are at increased risk of obesity during childhood and adult life. The percentage of women with pre-pregnancy obesity is highest for non-Hispanic Black Women and higher among Hispanic White women than their non-Hispanic White peers. An unhealthy weight gain during pregnancy can also put the baby/child at risk of obesity later in life.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Understand the relationship between a mother’s weight pre-pregnancy and a child’s susceptibility to obesity into the future. ● Understand the daily caloric needs for your body and eat/exercise to maintain a balance. ● Get to and maintain a healthy weight, before and during pregnancy, with five to nine servings of fruits and vegetables a day, lean proteins, whole grains, water as a preferred beverage, low fat dairy and limited amounts of red meats, refined grains, added sugars, alcohol, soda and sweetened beverages. ● Get your body ready for pregnancy; stop smoking, eat healthy, get enough sleep, and exercise regularly: Take care of your own health. ● Follow your doctor’s recommendation for weight gain. ● Establish or maintain a healthy level of physical activity during pregnancy. ● Resist the urge to use pregnancy as an “opportunity to overeat or splurge”. 	Five SMART (Sleep, Meals and Snacks, Activity, Role Modeling and Responsiveness and Things to Avoid) by CLOCC (Consortium to Lower Obesity in Chicago’s Children http://www.clocc.net/our-focus-areas/health-promotion-and-public-education/fivesmart/fivesmart-materials/ English & Spanish
3. Rapid Infant Weight Gain and Breastfeeding	
<p>Rapid weight gain during the first year of an infant’s life is a strong predictor of childhood overweight and obesity. Differences in rapid infant weight gain contribute substantially to racial and/or ethnic disparities in obesity during early childhood. Experts agree that breastfeeding is one way to mitigate rapid infant weight gain. After adjusting for demographics, children who were never breastfed were 22% more likely to be obese and those who had been breastfed for less than six months were 12% more likely to be obese than children who were breastfed for six months. Black mothers breastfeed at a lower rate than their Hispanic and White peers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Follow best practices and breastfeed exclusively for six months. ● Do not introduce solid foods into a baby’s diet until ideally six months, but not before four months. ● Make sure your infant is getting enough sleep. ● Allow for plenty of “tummy time” for a young infant and play and movement time for an older infant. Encourage motor development. ● Do not offer juice for babies under age one unless their doctor recommends. Limit juice intake for older children. ● The dietary guidelines recommend no added sugar for children under age two. 	

<p>4. Perception About Children’s Weight and What is a Healthy Weight</p> <p>Most (60%) parents of overweight children underestimate their children’s weight. Parents of younger children were significantly more likely to underestimate (65%) than parents of adolescents (51%). African American parents were twice as likely to underestimate as Whites. In the Hispanic culture, a “chubby baby” is often perceived as a “healthy baby.” Parents who perceive their child as overweight are significantly more likely to describe themselves as ready to make lifestyle changes to help their child lose weight than the parents who do not perceive their child to be overweight</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Discuss with your doctor where your child falls on the “BMI for age” scale. ● Understand there is a link between obesity and early (and later) health risks including early onset of Type II Diabetes, elevated blood pressure, high cholesterol, lack of energy/activity level, being bullied by other children about weight/size, depression, or self-esteem issues and so on. Later in life other health issues may emerge, including heart disease, strokes, diabetes, some cancers, joint pain, difficulty conceiving and so on. ● If your doctor raises or expresses concern, follow his/her advice, working to integrate best practices and healthy living habits into your child’s (and family) life. ● Do not obsess and make weight the issue. Simply focus on positive eating behaviors--you decide what you will serve and when it will be served but allow children to decide if they are hungry and how much they want to eat. Serve healthy meals and snacks (fruits and vegetables, lean protein, whole grains, and low-fat dairy). 	<p>Families Finding the Balance</p> <p>https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/educational/wecan/downloads/parent_hb_en.pdf English</p> <p>https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/educational/wecan/downloads/parent_hb_sp.pdf Spanish</p>
<p>5. Family Culture and Lifestyle</p> <p>Culture is observed, absorbed, learned, and shared and it is passed down from generation to generation. Among the many different races and ethnicities, it plays a significant role in the decisions and choices individuals make. Cultural factors play a role in why some groups of people are more likely to become obese during their lifetime. It influences how one might view obesity and body image as well as values, eating habits, lifestyle choices, and activity level.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Follow the strategies listed above in the “Perceptions about Weight” section. ● Objectively assess your family’s culture and lifestyle to determine what behaviors and beliefs contribute to your overall health and which impede your health. ● Decide which behaviors and beliefs you are willing to change, and which ones are non-negotiable: Decide which ones are embedded in your culture and from those decide which ones serve or do not serve you well. Ask yourself, what you are willing to change for your family’s health and which ones you will keep but find ways to mitigate the risk. ● Follow the 5.4.3.2.1 Go! ® Daily Guidelines: Young children need five servings of fruits and vegetables, four servings of water, three servings of low-fat dairy, two or fewer hours of screen time and 1-2 or more hours of physical activity daily for optimal health. ● Delay offering fast food to young children as long as possible and when you do offer it, make it a “now and then” and not a “daily” occurrence. ● Refrain from offering sugar-sweetened beverages to very young children and limit them to “now and then” for older children. ● No TV in children’s bedrooms. ● Visit www.forwarddupage.org and check out tips for Celebrating Healthy. 	<p>Go, Slow, Whoa Foods</p> <p>https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/educational/wecan/downloads/go-slow-whoa.pdf English</p> <p>https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/educational/wecan/downloads/go-slow-whoa-sp.pdf Spanish</p> <p>Healthy Holidays Foods and Fun</p> <p>https://newsinhealth.nih.gov/2016/11/healthy-holiday-foods-fun English</p> <p>https://salud.nih.gov/articulo/alimentos-saludables-y-diversion-para-las-fiestas/ Spanish</p>
<p>6. Early Caregivers</p> <p>In many racial/ethnic minority families, grandparents or other extended family members are typically involved in the upbringing and care of children and may influence parenting strategies and beliefs. While children are in their care, extended family may influence children's eating and physical activity behaviors. The research suggests a relationship between being overweight and having obesity and being in the care of relatives or nonrelatives in informal care settings.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● If you have your child enrolled in a child care or early learning program, ask about the program’s commitment to healthy living and the systems, policies, program curriculum and environment that supports healthy living and healthy habits. ● If you rely on family or family care providers to care for your infant or young child, share your expectations and healthy living strategies (food intake, choices, healthy eating strategies, 	<p>Go NAP SACC! (Nutrition and Physical Activity, Self-Assessment Child Care)</p> <p>https://gonapsacc.org/self-assessment-materials English</p> <p>https://gonapsacc.org/storage/tips_and_materials/Go%20NAPSACC_CN_Center_2021_Spanish_Eng_Biling_ual.pdf</p>

<p>limited screen time, daily physical activity, and plenty of sleep).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Check in with families and providers. Ask about lunch and snack menus, eating practices, children’s activity level and the amount of time children spend watching TV/videos or playing with computer screens (phones, laptops, desktops, handheld gadgets, etc.). 	<p>https://gonapsacc.org/storage/tips_and_materials/G0%20NAPSACC_ICPA_Center_2021_Spanish_Eng_Bilingual.pdf Spanish</p>
<p>7. Role of Extended Family</p> <p>Extended family members often provide support, information and resources and influence individual and household choices. For families that live in extended-family households, the influencers may be even stronger. When broken down by race: about 57 percent of Black and 35 percent of Hispanic children have lived in an extended family, compared to 20 percent of White children. The research suggests that compared with parents-based nuclear families, children brought up in extended family (including grandparents) might be at an increased risk of becoming obese.</p>	<p>5.4.3.2.1. Go! http://nebula.wsimg.com/afb2df35378b7674c1eacce4718dc1f6?AccessKeyId=74AC09CC0C10AAB2269C&disposition=0&alloworigin=1 English</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Keep the focus on health not weight or appearance. Focus on the overall health and healthy habits of the entire family and not just the child who is overweight. Embrace healthy habits for all and a healthier family in general. ● Engage grandparents and other extended family members in a discussion about children’s health and weight, sharing the latest research, healthy habit recommendations and best practices. ● Help grandparents understand the link between childhood obesity (babies and tots do not simply grow out of it) and the short- and long-term health implications. ● Share your expectations and monitor best practices. 	<p>http://nebula.wsimg.com/6f7500d49f9c383911f63edc4f441462?AccessKeyId=74AC09CC0C10AAB2269C&disposition=0&alloworigin=1 Spanish</p>
<p>8. Nutritional Value of Traditional or Soul Foods</p> <p>A poor diet may lead to obesity. Traditional Hispanic foods may leave families feeling happy and full, but they are high in carbohydrates and fat and are often low in fruits and vegetables. Soul food has been criticized for its high starch, fat, sodium, cholesterol and caloric content, as well as the inexpensive and often low-quality nature of the ingredients such as salted pork and cornmeal.</p>	<p>Soul Food Healthier https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/educational/healthdisp/pdf/recipes/Recipes-African-American.pdf</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Begin to think of high fat, refined grains, added sugars and empty calories as “now and then foods” and not something your child consumes daily. ● Modify your family’s favorite soul food recipes, making substitutions that include leaner meats, healthier fats (vegetable and canola or olive oil), oven-fried vs. deep fried, whole grains, fruits and vegetables and low-fat dairy. Substitute smoked turkey for fatty pork. Adapt recipes to include vegetarian alternatives and celebrate the nutritional value of collard and other greens but look for ways to reduce the cooking time and minimize the added fats. ● Mexican food can be healthy with a focus on beans, vegetables, chicken and soft-whole wheat tortillas. Substitute healthier or lower fat/sodium ingredients or bypass the fried tortillas, sour cream, and cheese. 	<p>Heart Healthy Latino Recipes https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/files/docs/public/heart/sp_recip.pdf</p>
<p>9. Level of Physical Activity</p> <p>Daily physical activity is important for both children and adults and a significant part of most weight-management strategies. In spite of the push for physical activity for all children, the research shows that African American and Hispanic/Latino children are less likely than their Caucasian peers to meet the daily requirements (at least one hour a day and ideally more).</p>	<p>Reduce Screen Time https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/educational/wecan/downloads/reduce-screen-time.pdf English</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Children need at least one hour, but ideally two or more hours of physical activity a day, structured and unstructured and some of it vigorous. ● Look for ways for the entire family to be active together: a family walk or bike ride, time at the local park, garden, rake leaves or shovel snow (play in the leaves and snow), dance to music, play active games like charades and Twister, etc. ● Enroll children in early learning and afterschool programs, including enrichment programs like swimming, age-appropriate youth sports, dance, etc. ● Find free or inexpensive community activities or look for financial assistance to participate in YMCA or park district programs. 	<p>https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/educational/wecan/downloads/reduzca.pdf Spanish</p> <p>Being an Active Family. https://gonapsacc.org/storage/tips_and_materials/TENTIP~1.PDF English https://gonapsacc.org/storage/tips_and_materials/10CONS~1.PDF Spanish</p>

<p>10. Socio-Economic Status: Affordable Food and Physical Activity</p> <p>Current research suggests that the disparities in childhood obesity associated with race/ethnicity are driven by disparities in socioeconomic status (SES). Low socioeconomic status children are almost twice more likely to experience obesity than high SES children. Race and ethnic minorities are disproportionately represented in the lower SES groups. The relationship between income and obesity is also impacted by the food environment, time constraints, food insecurity, and targeted marketing campaigns.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Join the anti-racism movement addressing what keeps minorities at risk for poverty. ● Access the healthiest foods using WIC and SNAP benefits. ● Use your local Food Pantry and be a voice for “healthy options” within the pantry. ● Research and participate in community free or low-costs activities and events: The DuPage County Parks and Forest Preserves are a great place to get started. ● Ask the YMCA or local Park District about their financial assistance options. ● Look for ways to prepare healthy meals on a budget. 	<p>Save Money and Shop Healthy https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/educational/wecan/downloads/tip-save-money.pdf English https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/educational/wecan/downloads/ahorro-dinero.pdf Spanish</p>
<p>11. Environmental Constraints</p> <p>The research shows that community/environmental factors such as the difference in available resources (e.g., safe play areas and full-service grocery stores with affordable fruits and vegetables) contribute to childhood obesity. It is well known that minority and low-income families are more likely to live in neighborhoods with limited options for physical activity and healthy food.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Advocate for safe parks, full-service supermarkets and affordable food and activity options in your community. ● Select legislators and city/village council members who understand the connection between healthy environments and healthy options, and healthy constituents and lower health care costs. 	<p>Mobilizing Community Through Advocacy https://www.bangthetable.com/blog/mobilising-community-through-advocacy/ English</p>
<p>12. Systemic Racism, Health and Family Stress</p> <p>One cannot look at the disparities in obesity and health among minority groups without also acknowledging the role systemic racism plays, particularly in the social determinants of health. Social determinants of health are the social structures, policies, and economic systems that affect health and quality of life outcomes. They are the conditions in which families live, work, play, and access health care and are impacted by racism, education disparities, income inequality, housing insecurity, transportation access, health systems and access to services, social isolation, food insecurity, unemployment, justice, and public safety concerns. All of these create undue stress for families.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Commit to healthy living while being an advocate to change the system and achieve equity and inclusion. ● Be empowered to take control of and change the “things that can be changed” ● To reduce stress: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage in daily physical activity and exercise for all. • Get plenty of quality sleep. • Nourish your body with healthier food choices. • Go outdoors and enjoy nature. • Practice deep breathing and meditation and mindfulness (even with children). • Journal and use art to work through stress: draw, paint, color, mold, etc. • Streamline your daily to-do list and say “no” more often. Do not “over program kids” • Reach out to your family, friends, a therapist, and social support system for help. 	<p>How to Deal with Family Stress https://www.scanva.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/FamilyStress_English.pdf https://www.scanva.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/FamilyStress_Spanish.pdf</p> <p>You Can Handle Stress https://www.scanva.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/ChildStress2016_English.pdf https://www.scanva.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/ChildStress2016_Spanish.pdf</p>

To review the research and specific information sources, go to www.forwarddupage.org for the full white paper: Practical Ways to Understand and Influence the Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Childhood Obesity. For general information, log onto FORWARD DUPAGE’S website @ www.forwarddupage.org