Conquering Childhood Obesity

Rx for doctors: Talk to parents about their kids' weight

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Increasing numbers of children suffer from grownup illnesses like heart disease, Type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure and sleep apnea—effects of an obesity epidemic that some experts say could shrink this generation's life expectancy. So the American Pediatrics Association recently directed its members to warn parents that kids' excess weight could turn into a deadly health problem. Now, more doctors are charting their patients' body mass index (BMI), the strongest indicator of obesity. And they're "talking to parents about their children's eating habits and exercise before weight becomes a problem," says Susan Okie, MD, author of *Fed Up! Winning the War Against Childhood Obesity* (Joseph Henry Press). Docs are uncomfortable raising the issue, Okie adds, "but they know it's important, and they're following through."

If your doctor brings up your child's weight, advises Andriette T. Ward, MD, a pediatrician at Children's Hospital Los Angeles, don't get angry or offended—or, worse, dismiss the warnings. Instead, Ward says, "Partner with your physician to make both immediate and long-term adjustments to the family lifestyle." That means talking to your doctor about how to incorporate a more healthful diet and a kid-appropriate exercise program into your child's life—and teaming up with the doc to make sure your child's weight problem is truly under control.

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