

Metabolic Syndrome in Children and Adolescents

What is metabolic syndrome?

- Metabolic syndrome is the name for a group of health problems that often leads to heart disease and diabetes. One of the main problems is being overweight, especially around the belly. Other problems are high blood pressure, high triglycerides (fat) in the blood, high blood sugar, and low HDL (“good”) cholesterol.

Why do we worry about it in children and teens?

- Metabolic syndrome is seen in young people and adults. It is a major risk for heart disease and diabetes. Type 2 diabetes, once called “adult onset diabetes,” is now found much more often in children and teens. Heart disease that leads to strokes and heart attacks begins in youth.

Is your child at risk?

- Overweight children and teens are more likely to develop metabolic syndrome.
- One way to tell if a child is overweight is to measure body mass index (BMI). BMI tells if someone is too heavy for his or her height. Children and teens

should have their BMI measured yearly. Ask your health care provider if your child’s BMI is in the top 15% for people of the same race, age, and sex. If so, it is too high.

- Your child’s blood pressure should also be checked at every medical visit.
- If your child is overweight or if type 2 diabetes runs in your family, your child’s blood sugar should be checked every 2 years. If it is over 100 mg/dl, there may be a problem.
- Fats in the blood (lipids) should be checked if your child is overweight or if early heart disease or high cholesterol run in your family.

How can you help your child to be healthier?

- Take your child for regular check-ups.
- Get active. Regular exercise can help children have a healthy weight and good blood pressure, blood sugar, and lipid levels. Help your child think of fun physical activities, and be active for at least a half-hour to an hour each day. Be active with your child to set a good example.

- Limit screen time. Cut back on the time your child spends watching TV, playing video games, or sitting at a computer. Limit these activities to no more than 2 hours a day.
- Help your child to make healthier food choices. Keep fresh fruits and vegetables in your home and encourage your child to eat at least five servings each day. Don’t keep lots of sweets and high-fat foods around for snacking. Stop buying sodas and other sugary drinks. Let your child see you eating and enjoying healthy foods, too.
- Avoid food struggles. Keep healthy foods on hand, and let your child choose which ones and how much to eat.
- If your child or teen is overweight, ask your health care provider for a referral to a dietitian who works with children and families.

