



## Nutrition and Healthy Living Intervention in Early, Middle Childhood

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The International Diabetes Federation (IDF) [1] reports that 10.5% of the world adult population (20-79) has diabetes. Of these cases, 90% are type 2 diabetes. These cases are projected to increase to 1 in 8 or 12.5% by the year 2045. In the United States, it is projected that 1 in 3 persons born in 2000 and beyond will develop diabetes in their lifetime if current trends continue [2]. Rates have risen and are projected to continue to rise across the globe. The IDF (2024) reports that 3 out of 4 people with diabetes live in low- and middle-income countries. Causes of type 2 diabetes are due, in large part, to lifestyle practices that lead to overweight and obesity such as sedentary behavior, overnutrition, and urbanization. Higher rates can also be seen in the aging population.

The World Health Organization (WHO) [3,4] reports that in 2022, 37 million people under the age of five years were overweight, over 230 million children aged 5 to 19 years were overweight, 160 million aged 5 - 19 years were obese. In 2022, 2.5 billion (43%) adults were overweight, of which 890 million (16%) were obese. Rates of overweight and obesity continue to increase among all age categories.

The World Health Organization's 2022 Global Status Report on Physical Activity reported that 80% of adolescents and 27.5% of adults across the world do not meet the WHO's recommendations for physical activity. Lack of physical activity and excess caloric intake contribute to obesity. Other factors that may contribute include, but may not be limited to, the environment, psychosocial factors, morbidities, and genetics. However, we would be remiss if we ignore early education and intervention are key, in most cases, in the prevention of both overweight and obesity.

Historically, type 2 diabetes was not seen in the youth. The rising rates of type 2 diabetes have coincided with the rising rates of overweight and obesity. Type 2 diabetes in the youth is now a global problem [2]. Prediabetes precedes type 2 diabetes. Without intervention, prediabetes progresses to type 2 diabetes in 5 years [5]. Intervention can potentially prevent or delay the onset of type 2 diabetes.

In addition to current national and world organizational efforts, we need more lifestyle intervention education specialists to thwart these alarming rates of overweight, obesity, and subsequently type 2 diabetes and other morbidities at the grassroots level.

As a registered dietitian and certified diabetes care and education specialist, children are often referred late for lifestyle intervention, when the child is no longer overweight, but obese. As a registered dietitian who worked in pediatrics, in a child obesity clinic, with Baby Talk and young teen mothers, I've learned, young parents need a lot of guidance. Parents yearn for information on how to read labels, plan healthy meals, shop healthy, cook healthy on a budget, plan engaging physical activities, etc.

Across the world, there are numerous professionals such as Registered Dietitians, Health Education Specialists, Health Educators, Nurse Educators, Fitness specialists, Physical Education Teachers, Lifestyle Coaches, Wellness Coaches, etc. that, given the right support and resources, can and will, work with General Practitioners, at annual, early and middle childhood well-checkup appointments, immediately after, to answer any questions/concerns the parent or guardian may have and to provide age-appropriate lifestyle education (nutrition, healthy living, etc.). The dietitian/health education specialist could also teach community education classes centering around healthy living (nutrition, physical activity, etc.). In some cultures, and parts of the world, it would be more appropriate to have one of the dietitians/health education specialists meet with and review the age-related nutrition and healthy living information for the child or class material on a routine basis with a well-respected member of the community outside of the community, serving as a liaison of information due to the cultural practices of the community. The dietitian/health education specialist could serve in this capacity as well.

In close, we need services such as these supported through global initiatives, grants, and policy. Education initiatives directed toward early and middle childhood lifestyle education and in-

tervention have potential to save millions of lives and billions of dollars globally given the projections for overweight, obesity and Type 2 Diabetes.

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