

Obesity

Obesity in Children with Autism

Is There a Link Between Obesity and Autism?



- Children with autism can have problems with obesity.
- These problems often start early in life.



- Some medications that help with social and behavior problems can cause kids to gain weight.

What Can Parents Do To Help?



- Kids with autism often get less physical activity than other children.
- Parents can make sure all their children get some physical activity every day!
- Parents also need to be aware of what a healthy weight is for their child.

What Can Health Care Providers Do To Help?



- Metformin can help kids who take medications that cause weight gain to not gain as much weight!
- Doctors can talk to families about the side effects of medications, and help the family monitor the child's weight on a regular basis.
- Doctors can help families understand the risks of their children weighing too much.

Researchers in the ATN found that more kids with autism were obese (were heavier than a healthy weight) than kids without autism.¹ Kids with autism often weigh too much earlier in life than kids without autism.² This could mean that there are different reasons for gaining weight in kids with and without autism. It is important to understand how to keep kids with autism from becoming too heavy and to take care of health risks from weighing too much.³ One reason kids with autism may be gaining weight is medications that address behavioral or social problems. A medicine called metformin may help kids who take these medications not gain as much weight.^{4,5} Also kids with autism often get less physical activity (playing, running, climbing, walking, etc.) than kids without autism.⁶ More physical activity in general may help kids with autism get to and stay at a healthy weight.

**Disclaimer: This summary is based on research conducted by Autism Treatment Network (ATN) members. It is not a summary of the entire body of research literature available on this subject*

Frequently Asked Questions

1. IS THERE A LINK BETWEEN OBESITY AND AUTISM?

- More children with autism are obese (heavier than a healthy weight) than children without autism¹
- Children with autism often weigh too much earlier in life²

2. WHY IS THIS HAPPENING?

- Some medications that are used to help with social and behavior problems can cause kids to gain weight^{4,5}
- Kids with autism often get less physical activity than kids without autism⁶

3. WHAT CAN PARENTS DO TO HELP?

- Make sure all children get at least some physical activity every day – running, climbing, jumping, walking, playing, etc.⁶
- Be aware of what a healthy weight is for their child

4. WHAT CAN HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS DO TO HELP?

- Metformin can help kids who take medications that cause weight gain to not gain as much weight^{4,5}
- Talk to families about the side effects of medications and if weight gain is a side effect, help the family monitor the child's weight on a regular basis
- Help the families understand how to keep kids with autism from becoming too heavy and take care of the risks of weighing too much³

References

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