**Ways to Combat Childhood Obesity During the COVID-19 Lockdown**

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The surging COVID-19 cases have delayed opening of schools and have forced children to resort to virtual learning. Without any access to recreational, outdoor activities, children are packing on pounds.

The UT Physicians pediatricians are seeing the evidence of weight gain in children during consultations via telemedicine appointments. According to them, the problem could get worse, causing lingering negative health issues for a generation of youth.

During the school year, most parents rely on schools to provide their child with regular exercise.Because of the ongoing situation surrounding COVID-19, it is important for parents to focus on their child's health and ensure they are getting the proper exercise and nutrition to avoid child obesity. With virtual learning, children miss out on the opportunity to run around with friends, go for walks, or participate in gym workouts, which are sources of great physical activity for kids.

The added stress of living in this time of uncertainty can lead to children engaging in unhealthy eating habits like more of sugary and fatty snacks this contributes to their weight gain and affects their long-term health.

Obesity is usually caused by multiple factors, including taking in too many high-calorie, low-nutrient foods and drinks, unhealthy sleep habits, and too much screen and sedentary time - which lead to a lack of physical activity.

**Health Risks of Childhood Obesity**
Children who are overweight are at high risk for developing lifestyle conditions like diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, breathing problems such as asthma, and many psychological problems, including anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem.
"Children who develop unhealthy habits are most likely to carry these traits to adulthood, so it's important to combat these issues at a young age to avoid these risks,"Samuel said.

**Ways to Keep Children Active**
There are limitations in keeping children active as they are spending most of their time at home due to COVID-19 precautions. But families can still do their bit in terms of engaging them in a healthy diet and at-home workouts.

There are plenty of apps with videos for short, home-based workouts that usually require little or no equipment. Another option is to get outside for a daily 30-minute walk or jog. As long as you are maintaining social distancing and staying with members of your household, this is a safe way to get some fresh air and regular exercise. Parents are encouraged to create a schedule to prioritize their child's health through a healthy diet, and good exercise habits.

**Diet**
A healthy and balanced protein-rich diet is important for muscle growth in children. Diet should contain many fresh fruits and vegetables, including green leafy vegetables, which are imperative. Frozen fruits and vegetables are a good option in the absence of fresh produce as long as it does not contain added sugar or salt.

Parents can also limit the intake of unhealthy drinks like soda, sweetened juices, and sports drinks. Snacks high in fat and sugar like chips, cookies, and gummy snacks should also be avoided.

**Exercise**
Children should be engaged to move around for three to five minutes in an hour. Activities like jumping rope or running help to build bone strength. Games like tug-of-war strengthen muscles. Aerobic activities like bike riding or walking are good for the heart. Adding a fun twist to the activities will help to hold the attention of children.

In addition to regular diet and exercise, getting a proper amount of sleep per night is also important for good health. Teenagers need around eight to ten hours of sleep at night, while children aged 6-12 years need 12 hours of sleep. Reducing screen time can also help reduce the risk of obesity.

Later bedtimes have been shown to be associated with obesity, so putting the devices away at a reasonable bedtime and getting back to a more typical sleep schedule is another way to combat obesity. As parents, we need to understand that a healthy diet and exercise provide great benefits to our children's minds and bodies. Many kids are stressed right now due to all of the uncertainty surrounding COVID-19, and doing regular exercise is a great way to relieve stress and develop healthy habits at a young age.