

Obesity in children and the role of teacher in dealing with it- Post Pandemic

Prof.Vibha Asthana

Advisor-cum-Director, Ghulam Ahmed College of Education,
Hyderabad, Telangana, India.

ABSTRACT

Post pandemic, obesity in children has reached epidemic levels in almost all homes of India. Obesity has a significant impact on the physical and psychological health of the child. Overweight children are most likely to become the victims of obesity in adulthood also. Their life expectancy decreases and they may suffer from lack of confidence, anxiety, diabetes and cardiovascular diseases at a younger age. A few of the causes of obesity are- Environmental factors, lifestyle preferences, and cultural environment. In general, overweight and obesity are a result of increased intake of calorie rich foods, fat and a steady decline in physical activity. Obese children have low self esteem and their physical, emotional and social well being is also impacted. Due to this, their academic performance may also be poor. School is an important media which helps solve this problem and teachers play a critical role in controlling obesity in children. This article enumerates what caused obesity in children during pandemic and how it can be reversed. If parents foster a healthy lifestyle at home and if teacher's guide them at school, many children who have obesity will recover from this problem.

Keywords: *Childhood obesity, epidemic, psychological health, lifestyle, academic performance, self esteem.*

INTRODUCTION:

One of the most serious health challenges after the pandemic was childhood obesity. The prevalence of obesity in children increased at an alarming rate after the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in the urban areas. Obesity during childhood is a serious health issue and this problem magnified during the pandemic and lockdown. Children with obesity may have multiple health issues like diabetes (type-2), cardio vascular problems, high level of cholesterol, high blood pressure, joint pains, fatty liver, etc. Studies have shown that the rate of BMI almost doubled in children during the pandemic. The reasons for children becoming obese are many. The important ones being- diet, eating habits, genetics, life style, physical exercise, playing, etc.

Definition of Childhood Obesity- Childhood obesity can be defined as an excess of fat in the body. An Indian Research study has defined overweight and obesity as overweight (between $\geq 85^{\text{th}}$ and $< 95^{\text{th}}$ percentile) and obesity ($\geq 95^{\text{th}}$ percentile).

FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR INCREASE IN CHILDHOOD OBESITY DURING THE PANDEMIC-

Many factors attributed to childhood obesity during the pandemic and lockdown. The diet of the child, physical activity, sedentary lifestyle are a few main factors. Other factors that influenced obesity were age, gender, cultural background of the family, style of parenting, lifestyle of the children, the environment in which they grow up, etc. Genetics and Basal metabolic rate of the children also attribute to obesity.

Diet of children- Dietary factors are mainly responsible for increase in the rate of obesity. Dietary factors include consumption of fast food, fizzy drinks, snack food and portion sizes. Numerous factors were responsible for a poor diet in children during the pandemic. The parental factor is hugely responsible for a poor diet. During the pandemic, with all family members at home and nothing much to do, the focus of the adults was on food. New items were being cooked and there was no count of the calories being consumed. Children normally follow what the parents and their siblings do. If children are exposed to healthy foods, they prefer to eat healthy food rather than food that may lead to obesity. Family that sits on the table and eats together tends to consume more healthy foods. Frequent ordering of food from restaurants, eating out or eating while watching television is associated with higher intake of fat rich and junk food. The kind of food given to the children by the parents, their attitude towards the type of food eaten by the children, are also factors which may lead to obesity. Often children celebrate their birthdays and special occasions by eating junk food as it is associated with pleasure and convenience. Eating of junk/fast food is one of the major factors responsible for obesity. Fast food is inexpensive and easily available for the parents to buy. It is tasty and it can be ordered easily using Swiggy or Zomato. Fast food has low nutritional value and contains a lot of calories in it.

Fizzy drinks and colas are another factor that may cause obesity in children. Even the canned fruit juice advertised as being healthy, is full of sugar and if consumed in excess may lead to obesity. Sugar drinks are less filling than food and can be consumed quicker, which results in a high calorie intake.

Snack foods- children consumed a lot of snacks during pandemic in between meals, when they were at home. Snack food included potato chips, biscuits, chocolates, etc

Portion size of the meal- the amount of food consumed by the children in a meal/ snack increased during the pandemic. Eating large portions and snacking on food rich in calories contributed to excessive calorie intake and thereby leading to obesity.

Activity level is one of the factors that may cause obesity. Low level of activity or a sedentary lifestyle combined with a high calorie diet is harmful for children. During the pandemic, children would be at home as there was a lock town and they would play on electronic gadgets or watch television. The increased amount of time spent in this kind of sedentary behaviour lead to children spending less time outdoors, no physical activity or playing outside. When children sit in front of the television they tend to you eat a lot of snacks, which may be very rich in calories and lead to obesity. The advertisements for sale of unhealthy food is also responsible for children buying and eating food that lack nutrition and are fattening.

Environmental factors - There is a drastic change in the environment of a home after mobile phones entered the lives of people. Today the home environment is such that it has reduced the opportunities for physical activity. Children would go to school by walk, on bicycle or in bus but due to pandemic, they had to stay at home.

Family factors- each family has a particular preference for food depending on their cultural background. Different people prefer to eat different types of food. Children who are pampered and single tend to be obese. Also if parents are obese, then children also have a tendency to get obese.

Psychological factors-due to the pandemic, children could not go out, meet their friends or socialize. On account of this, many of them got into depression and anxiety disorders. Over eating is related to these psychological issues and that may lead to obesity.

ACADEMIC CONSEQUENCES -

Obesity and its influence of the child's academics – The academic performance of children in schools is affected on account of obesity. A research study concluded that overweight and obese children were four times more likely to have academic problems at school than their normal weight peers. Obese children may also be the victims of several chronic illnesses and hence may be irregular to school. The academic performance is effected.

Self esteem-obesity affects the self esteem of an individual. Children who are obese are normally made fun of, hence their self-esteem may be low.

ROLE OF TEACHERS/ SCHOOL AUTHORITIES:

- School principals should motivate parents to give healthy food and a physically active life to their children.
- Teachers can share with the parents, recipes to make healthy, nutritious, tasty, affordable foods and beverages for the children.
- In the school, children should have access to safe, free drinking water.
- Schools should have a clean playground with indoor and outdoor play equipment and sports fields and children should be allowed to use these facilities after school hours also.
- TV time and playing games on gadgets should be restricted and physical outdoor activity should be encouraged. Use of mobile phones, screen time, junk food should be strictly restricted or completely avoided. Teachers should take care that children do not spend much time watching television or using other electronic devices like mobiles, Tablets, etc.
- The school should maintain a record of the child's weight and the parents should be cautioned if there is any sign of obesity.
- Parents should be warned if the child has faulty food habits (eating excess junk food) and they should be counselled about nutrition, importance of physical activity, proper rest and sleep.
- Teachers can monitor the students during 'snack' and 'lunch' time and he/she can be a role model by eating healthy, nutritious food.
- Teachers should avoid drinking sugary drinks and colas and encourage the children to do the same.
- Children should be encouraged to eat fruits, vegetables, and other nutritious foods for meals and snacks.

- Encourage children to be active- they should be encouraged and asked to play outdoors instead of indoors.
- Children should be asked to get a minimum of 8 hours of sleep. Staying up late at night and waking up late in the morning should be discouraged.

CONCLUSION-The problem of obesity caused on account of the pandemic, in children can be solved to large extent,if the focus is on its cause rather than treatment. One needs to understand the component that causes obesity in the child. A combination of a healthy diet and physical workout or activity will definitely help in solving the problem of obesity. School is an important media which helps solve this problem and teachers play a critical role in controlling obesity in children. If parents foster a healthy lifestyle at home and if teacher's guide them at school, many children who have obesity will recover from this problem. The learning that happens at home with regards to eating, exercising and making the right diet choice will have an influence on all aspects of a child's life. The harm caused to the children on account of the pandemic can be resolved if the parents and teachers work together and encourage children to have a healthy lifestyle.

References:

- Popkin BM, Doak CM. The obesity epidemic is a worldwide phenomenon. *Nutr Rev.* 1998;56:106–14. [[PubMed](#)] [[Google Scholar](#)]
- Panjikkaran ST, Kumari K. Augmenting BMI and Waist-Height Ratio for establishing more efficient obesity percentiles among school children. *Indian J Community Med.* 2009;34:135–9. [[PMC free article](#)] [[PubMed](#)] [[Google Scholar](#)]
- 3. Bhave S, Bavdekar A, Otiv M. IAP National Task Force for Childhood, Prevention of Adult Diseases: Childhood Obesity. IAP National Task Force for Childhood Prevention of Adult Diseases: Childhood Obesity. *Indian Pediatr.* 2004;41:559–75. [[PubMed](#)] [[Google Scholar](#)]
- 4. Raj M, Sundaram KR, Paul M, Deepa AS, Kumar RK. Obesity in Indian children: Time trends and relationship with hypertension. *Natl Med J India.* 2007;20:288–93. [[PubMed](#)] [[Google Scholar](#)]