



# TEACHER & PARENT RESOURCES

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## Charts Predict If Kids May Grow Fat

The nation's growing girth isn't just an adult problem – obesity is affecting kids at an alarming rate. Now, new growth charts may help prevent kids at risk from becoming fat. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the centers for Disease Control and Prevention announced Tuesday the availability of a new pediatric growth chart that uses body mass index (BMI) to predict which kids are at risk for weight problems. "The BMI is an early warning signal that is helpful as early as age 2," HHS Secretary Donna E. Shalala said in a statement. "This means that parents have an opportunity to change their children's eating habits before a weight problem develops."

According to the CDC, the number of overweight children and adolescents doubled during the last two decades. Currently, about 10 percent of all American children are overweight, while more than half of adults are overweight or obese. Establishing healthy eating and exercise habits is key during childhood, but changing lifestyle patterns becomes harder as a child gets older.

The growth chart is an updated version of what doctors have been using since 1977. The World Health Organization adopted these charts in 1978. The chart consists of a series of curves called percentiles. A BMI that falls in the 85<sup>th</sup> to 95<sup>th</sup> percentile means the child is at risk for becoming overweight. A child who falls above the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile is considered overweight.

Numerous critics have blamed the nation's bulge on fast-food culture, too much television watching and a lack of regular physical activity. Secretary Shalala and Surgeon General David Satcher, who have repeatedly voiced concerns over the growing childhood obesity rate, announced they will hold a workshop this fall to develop a national plan to attack America's obesity problem. Obesity is a risk factor for diabetes, even among children, and also can lead to heart disease, cancer and other health problems in adulthood.

Dr. Shalaha announced the charts at the National Nutrition Summit being held Tuesday and today in Washington, D.C. The growth charts can be seen on CDC's Web Site.

## Parents Need to Do Their Homework When It Comes to Drugs

It is no secret that we live in an age of information overload. An Internet search of the word drugs and alcohol abuse at Google.com, for example, generated 440,000 responses in just seconds. Yet, how many parents could tell the difference between a bag of tea from the co-op and a baggie of marijuana? How many would know how to determine if their child's animated talkativeness was youthful exuberance or a symptom of cocaine or methamphetamine use? How does a parent sort out bad information about drugs from accurate and helpful information? Remember the Blue Star LSD scare?

In their efforts to protect and inform, well-meaning people, organizations and corporations perpetuated a hoax for over 20 years that LSD tattoos of popular cartoon characters could cause hallucinations—even death—when a child touched one. There is no such thing as an LSD tattoo, but despite efforts to debunk this urban myth, it lives on.

Fortunately, parents who want to educate themselves about drug abuse and prevention don't have to look very far. For instance, the government's Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration (SAMHSA) maintains a national clearinghouse of printed and audiovisual materials on illegal and legal drugs. (Call 1-800-788-2800 or visit their Web site at [www.health.org](http://www.health.org) for more information).

Another handy resource is a new book called *Dangerous Drugs: An Easy to Use Reference for Parents and Professionals* (Hazelden, 2000) by Carol Falkowski. This book is a clear, concise guide to illegal drugs of abuse such as marijuana, heroin, cocaine, LSD, and methamphetamines, as well as legal substances such as alcohol, nutritional supplements and cigarettes. Falkowski has researched trends and dangers of drug use since 1986 and are one of 20 researchers in the United States who participate in an ongoing drug abuse surveillance network of the National Institute on Drug Abuse. She says she wrote *Dangerous Drugs* for parents, teachers, counselors, and others who want to know the big picture about drug use, abuse, and treatment – not just the basic science. She gives indicators and effects of use, signs of overdose, and tells readers about the short- and long-term consequences of a particular drug.

Parents who do their homework can learn much from credible researchers like Falkowski. They could discover how one out of five eighth-graders inhaled common household or industrial products at least once to get high. They could learn to suspect inhalant abuse if a child seems dizzy or lightheaded, has a rash around their mouth, has red eyes and a runny nose or paint stains on their body or clothing. They could learn that inhalants are poisons, not drugs, that can result in Sudden Sniffing Death Syndrome.

Falkowski says that for drug and alcohol prevention efforts to be effective, kids must get the same message from many messengers. For example, because inhalants are poisons, kids should hear about their dangers in science and health classes as well as during a drug education class.

A 1977 study published by the National Institute of Health indicated that parents who stay involved in their children's lives and who communicate clear expectations and consequences for their children's behavior positively influence the decisions their children make about drugs and alcohol. And the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism recently found that people who began drinking

after they turned 21 were far less likely to become alcohol abusers than those who started drinking at a younger age.

Believe it or not, your children are listening to what you have to say about drugs, so it's crucial that your information is solid and trustworthy. It takes more than clever sound bites like just say no, which can become meaningless. It takes straightforward communication by non-alarmist adults who have taken the time to sort drug facts from drug fiction. It takes drug-savvy parents who make talking about drugs with kids an ongoing process.

To learn more about the book *Dangerous Drugs*, read about it online or call 1-888-535-9485.  
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*Alive & Free is a chemical health column provided by Hazelden, a nonprofit agency based in Center City, Minn., that offers a wide range of information and services relating to addiction and recovery. For more resources on substance abuse, call Hazelden at 1-888-535-9485 or check its Web site at [www.hazelden.org](http://www.hazelden.org)*