

National Childhood Obesity Awareness Month, recognized in September, highlights the growing public health challenge of childhood obesity in the United States. The goal is to promote healthier lifestyles for children through improved nutrition and physical activity.

Childhood obesity occurs when a child's weight is significantly above a healthy range for their age and height, often assessed using body mass index (BMI). It affects physical and emotional well-being and can impact long-term quality of life. However, it's not just about individual choices; it reflects broader social and economic factors. Addressing it requires compassion, awareness, and a collective effort to create healthier environments for all children.

Childhood Obesity in Louisiana and Who Is Most Affected?

Louisiana has one of the highest childhood obesity rates in the U.S. According to the National Survey of Children's Health, 19.1% of children aged 10 to 17 in Louisiana are considered obese compared to the national average of 15.8%. Overall, more than 40% of children in the state are either overweight or obese.

National data shows that obesity affects some groups more than others. Children living in rural areas and low-income families face limited access to fresh, affordable food, fewer safe spaces for physical activity, and a lack of regular healthcare. These barriers contribute to higher rates of obesity. About 26.2% of Hispanic children and 24.8% of non-Hispanic Black children are considered obese compared to 16.6% of non-Hispanic White children and 9.0% of non-Hispanic Asian children. These differences show why it is important to create healthier communities and give all children the support they need to make healthier choices and live healthier lives.

What Can Be Done?

Research shows that the best way to fight childhood obesity is through education, behavior change, and environmental support.

- **At home**, establish healthy habits as a family. Parents and caregivers can help by serving balanced meals, cutting back on sugary drinks, eating together, and encouraging kids to get 60 minutes of physical activity each day.
- **In communities**, improving access to parks, safe sidewalks, and grocery stores with fresh food can make a big difference. Local leaders can support after-school programs and farmers markets to help families live healthier lives.
- **In schools**, offering free or low-cost nutritious meals, daily physical activity, and education on food and health are key. Schools can also work with families and public health organizations to promote wellness.
- **In healthcare**, pediatricians play an important role by tracking growth, offering advice, and connecting families with experts like dietitians or counselors. Regular check-ups catch problems early and offer support.

Childhood obesity is a problem we can face together. Small changes, like healthier meals, more active play, and stronger community support can lead to big improvements in a child's life. Everyone has a role to play, and now is the time to act so every child can grow up healthy and reach their full potential.



September is National Childhood Obesity Awareness Month, and while most people think of it as an issue that affects younger kids, I cannot help but notice how it connects to the college experience too.

We can no longer rely on the routines that we could count on at home.

The college experience can be particularly stressful, resulting in irregular eating patterns. Academic pressures can deepen feelings of low self-esteem tied to weight, potentially leading to unhealthy coping mechanisms that further perpetuate the cycle of obesity.

To combat obesity among college students, universities can promote healthy habits on campus. This could include showing educational posters about portion sizes in dining halls and expanding the variety of nutritious foods available. Organizing cooking workshops could engage students, allowing them to learn new recipes and nurture a sense of community through home-cooked meals. Additionally, investing in gym facilities and providing guidance on equipment usage can encourage physical activity by making it more accessible. Colleges can also offer mindfulness programs and emotional resilience workshops to help students manage stress in healthy ways, reducing the risk of disordered eating and supporting overall well-being.

By implementing these strategies, colleges can help students develop healthy habits and improve their overall well-being, setting them up for success in their academic and personal lives for years to come.



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