

# Parenting To Prevent Obesity

**It's about parenting, not just about diet!** How so? A strict or authoritarian parenting style is strongly linked to a risk of obesity in young children, according to a study published in the June 2006 edition of the journal *Pediatrics*. Yet permissiveness can also lead to obesity. So where does that leave parents who want to do what is right for their children's health?

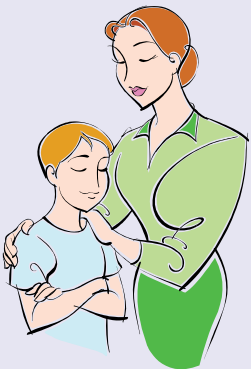


**Researchers looked at four different parenting styles: *authoritarian, permissive, neglectful and authoritative.*** They found that the children of authoritarian parents—those with high expectations for self-control in their children and a low sensitivity to the developmental and emotional needs of their children—had a much higher risk of being obese in first grade. Permissive and neglectful parents also had higher rates of obesity risk.

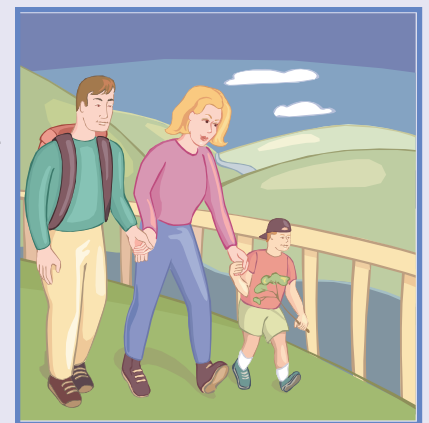
**\*Children with the lowest risk of obesity\*** were those growing up with authoritative parents, defined as those who had the same high expectations for self-control, but were sensitive to the needs of their children and more open to compromise (as opposed to strict disciplinarians). Rules are established and consistent, but parents are tuned in to their children's opinions, needs and feelings.

**This study brings up an important point:** when it comes to childhood obesity, there's much more to the *story*—and the *solutions*—than just food. Given the epidemic of obesity among children, parents need to be aware of this, and think outside the cereal box. Here are some tips to help.

**Your child's opinion matters.** Yes, your child needs vegetables. But instead of making your youngster stay seated until every last pea is finished, talk about which vegetables are favorites and which are less appealing. If salads are a favorite, serve them frequently and with a little different twist each time. If dipping veggies into Ranch Dressing makes them more palatable, buy the low-fat kind and dip away.



**Watch your words.** Don't call your children fat, don't compare them to others, don't talk about their eating or weight when others (especially peers) can hear you. Doing so will make children feel bad about themselves—and make your diet and exercise interventions feel like punishments. Also, feeling bad leads to greater risk for depression, which increases risk of obesity! Instead, talk to your children about wanting them to be healthy and be sure to notice and celebrate their strengths and accomplishments. Your children need to know that there's more to them than what a scale says, and that you love them no matter what they weigh.



**Make Activities FUN!** Diet and exercise are part of the bigger picture of your child's life. How you interact with your child about diet and exercise are part of the bigger parenting picture. If you keep that in mind and keep a positive outlook, your entire family will have a much better chance of fighting obesity—and staying healthy.

References: [intelihealth.com](http://intelihealth.com), [jstor.org](http://jstor.org), [newenglandjournalofmedicine.org](http://newenglandjournalofmedicine.org) & [bmj.com](http://bmj.com)