

## CHILDHOOD OBESITY AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

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### Abstract

Childhood obesity has emerged as a pressing global health issue in recent years, demanding serious attention. This article analyzes the causes, physical, psychological, and social consequences of childhood obesity, as well as prevention strategies, from a scientific perspective. Genetic, environmental, and lifestyle factors play a significant role in the prevalence of obesity. The article examines both short- and long-term consequences, including chronic diseases, mental health issues, and the risk of social isolation. Additionally, it highlights effective prevention measures at the family, school, and state levels. The importance of local research and strategies in addressing this issue in Uzbekistan is emphasized.

**Keywords:** Childhood obesity, obesitas, healthy lifestyle, physical activity, dietary habits, psychological consequences, prevention, chronic diseases, Uzbekistan.

### Introduction

Childhood obesity is recognized as one of the most pressing public health challenges in the modern world. According to the World Health Organization's (WHO) 2020 reports, approximately 39 million children under the age of 5 worldwide are living with obesity or overweight, a figure six times higher than in 1975. In Uzbekistan, urbanization, changing dietary habits, and declining physical activity have contributed to a rising prevalence of childhood obesity. This issue not only affects a child's physical health but also has a profound impact on their psychological well-being and social integration. The long-term consequences of obesity, particularly the increased risk of cardiovascular diseases, type 2 diabetes, and certain types of cancer, pose a significant threat to the health of future generations. In Uzbekistan, childhood obesity is studied in the context of local socio-economic conditions, cultural characteristics, and the capabilities of the healthcare system. For instance, the widespread consumption of fast food and sugary beverages in urban areas, coupled with limited access to healthy foods in rural regions, exacerbates the problem. This article aims to provide a scientifically grounded analysis of the causes, consequences, and effective prevention strategies for childhood obesity in the context of Uzbekistan. By addressing the multifaceted nature of obesity, the article seeks to serve as a valuable guide for healthcare professionals, parents, and policymakers. Obesity is determined based on the Body Mass Index (BMI), calculated as the ratio of body weight (in kilograms) to the square of height (in meters). In children, BMI is assessed using standardized percentile charts based on age and gender. According to WHO, children with a BMI above the 95th percentile are classified as obese. In Uzbekistan, according to the Ministry of Health's 2023 data, approximately 10-15% of school-aged children suffer from overweight or obesity, with higher rates in urban areas. The prevalence of obesity is



uneven globally, with rapid increases in developing countries due to urbanization and the growth of the food industry. In Uzbekistan, this trend is linked to lifestyle changes in urban populations, including the proliferation of fast-food restaurants and reduced physical activity. For example, studies conducted among schoolchildren in Tashkent show that over 60% of children spend more than two hours daily in front of screens, significantly reducing their physical activity.

**Causes of Obesity:** Childhood obesity is multifactorial, driven by the interplay of genetic, environmental, and socio-economic factors. While genetic predisposition increases the risk of obesity, modern research emphasizes the dominance of lifestyle and environmental factors. The increased consumption of high-calorie, low-nutrient foods, such as carbonated drinks, sweets, and processed products, is a primary driver of obesity. In Uzbekistan, the high carbohydrate and fat content of traditional dishes, such as plov and bread products, can contribute to excessive calorie intake when consumed improperly. Reduced physical activity is another significant cause of obesity. Modern children often spend time on smartphones, computers, or televisions instead of engaging in sports. In Uzbekistan, the lack of adequate physical education programs in schools and limited sports infrastructure further aggravates the issue. Parental dietary habits and parenting styles also influence a child's risk of obesity. For instance, using food as a reward or offering large portion sizes can contribute to obesity. Socio-economic factors are also critical. In low-income families, access to healthy foods, such as fruits and vegetables, is often limited, leading to reliance on cheaper, high-calorie products. In rural areas of Uzbekistan, this issue is particularly pronounced, as the cost of healthy foods can be higher compared to urban areas.

**Consequences of Obesity:** The impact of obesity on children's health is extensive and long-lasting. From a physical perspective, obesity increases the risk of type 2 diabetes, hypertension, dyslipidemia, and cardiovascular diseases. Studies conducted in Uzbekistan indicate that elevated blood sugar levels are already observed in obese children aged 10-14. Orthopedic issues, such as joint damage and foot deformities, are also common among obese children. Non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (steatosis), associated with obesity, can lead to serious conditions like liver cirrhosis in the future. Psychologically, obesity contributes to low self-esteem, depression, and anxiety in children. Peer bullying or discrimination often exacerbates social isolation among obese children. Psychological studies in Uzbekistan show that obese children tend to feel inferior to their peers, negatively affecting their academic performance. Socially, obesity impacts a child's participation in school activities and social relationships. Obese children are often excluded from group activities and feel isolated, which can hinder their future social integration and professional success. Long-term consequences are even more alarming, as 50-80% of obese children remain obese into adulthood, increasing their risk of cardiovascular diseases, cancer, and other chronic conditions.

**Prevention of Obesity:** Addressing childhood obesity requires a multifaceted approach. At the family level, parents should teach children healthy eating habits, encouraging the consumption of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat proteins while limiting sugary drinks and high-



calorie snacks. In Uzbekistan, adapting traditional dishes by reducing fat content and increasing vegetable intake can help lower the risk of obesity. Increasing physical activity is critical for obesity prevention. Children should be encouraged to participate in sports, outdoor games, or physical education classes at school. In Uzbekistan, expanding physical education programs and developing sports infrastructure are necessary steps. For example, pilot programs promoting physical activity in some Tashkent schools have shown promising results. At the state and healthcare levels, measures should include restricting advertisements for unhealthy foods, promoting healthy lifestyles, and improving access to healthy foods for low-income families. In Uzbekistan, initiatives under the “Healthy Generation” program aim to prevent childhood obesity, but these efforts need to be expanded and tailored to local conditions. Scientific research highlights that early intervention is the most effective approach to preventing obesity. Teaching healthy eating and physical activity habits to preschool-aged children yields long-term positive outcomes. Strengthening collaboration between healthcare and education systems in Uzbekistan is essential to scaling up such programs.

In conclusion, childhood obesity is one of the most pressing public health problems in Uzbekistan and around the world. Its causes stem from a complex interaction of genetic, environmental, and socioeconomic factors. The physical consequences, such as type 2 diabetes, hypertension, and fatty liver disease, pose serious threats to children’s health. Psychological and social consequences further harm their mental well-being and social integration. In Uzbekistan, addressing obesity requires coordinated efforts at the family, school, and state levels. Promoting healthy eating habits, increasing physical activity, and addressing socioeconomic challenges can help mitigate this issue. Evidence-based strategies and early interventions will ensure that future generations lead healthier lives.

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