

[IMAGE]

Even When You're Young...

By Editorial Staff

Weight matters even when you're young, and not just for the common reasons parents and kids think. Yes, weight issues can either be a sign of trauma or cause trauma in and of themselves; or may reflect chronically poor eating habits and lack of exercise. But an increasingly body of research also suggests childhood weight can set the stage for health problems for a lifetime.

Take heart health, for example. Can being overweight or obese in adolescence increase the risk that you'll suffer a stroke in adulthood? According to study findings published in *Stroke*, a journal of the American Heart Association, yes. Researchers evaluated adolescent body-mass index (BMI) and first stroke before the age of 50 among 1.9 million men and women tracked beginning at ages 16-20.

Compared to low-normal BMI, above-average BMI (overweight) doubled the stroke risk before age 50; obesity (high BMI) more than tripled the risk. In fact, even having a BMI in the high-normal range increased stroke risk compared to low-normal BMI. Even when accounting for type 2 diabetes, a known risk factor for stroke, overweight / obese adolescents still had a significantly higher stroke risk in adulthood compared to normal-weight (normal-BMI) adolescents.

While the study did not assess weight during adulthood (in other words, whether study participants who were normal weight during adolescence gained weight as adults, or whether overweight / obese adolescents lost weight during adulthood), previous research suggests that children who are overweight often have weight issues throughout their lives.

Which brings us to the moral of the story: Weight matters, even when you're young. If your child has weight issues, a conversation with your doctor may be the first step in gently steering them toward a healthier weight and addressing any issues that may be contributing to the weight.

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