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Script - Pre-recorded presentation

Introduction

Today I will discuss childhood obesity as a crucial component of health, wellness, and lifestyle in early childhood education and care. When a child has excess body fat that could harm their growth and health, it's referred to as childhood obesity. In the United Kingdom growth charts are usually used to measure a child's body mass, which compare a child's height and weight to what is deemed healthy for their age and sex. These charts are typically used by professionals in several settings within early years to measure this. (RCPCH, 2009)

Obesity in early children is recognised as a complex, chronic disorder influenced by biological programming, environmental variables, and severe developmental concerns that can start even before birth. (Cleveland Clinic, 2024) It is not only about weight, it can consist of many other things such as diet, exercise, mental health, family life, and broader social influences are all directly related to it. As early years practitioners, we have a special opportunity to promote healthy behaviours during a crucial stage of development.

Why Childhood Obesity Is Significant?

In the UK and around the world, childhood obesity is a serious public health issue.

Childhood obesity is significant because it has both immediate and long-term consequences for children's health and wellbeing. The early years, from birth to age five, are critical for forming lifetime food, activity, and health-related habits. Around age six, children go through a phase of fast fat cell growth. If this happens too soon, the body may be primed for obesity in maturity by permanently increasing the amount of fat cells. Numerous studies have shown that children who are overweight or obese in their early years are more likely to remain that way into later childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. (Llewellyn *et al.*, 2016) Because of this, early intervention is very crucial.

Since children from underprivileged homes are statistically more likely to have poor diets, limited access to safe outdoor play, and less health support, obesity in young children is also closely associated with health disparities. (Er *et al.*, 2024)

Even at a young age, obesity can have a major effect on many factors. Children who are overweight or obese may have low self-esteem, diminished confidence, and feelings of shame or embarrassment about their body on an emotional and social level. Children may be more vulnerable to peer bullying, exclusion, or teasing as they get older, which can have a detrimental impact on their mental health and sense of community. Weight related stigma may start to affect a child's self-image in their early years because research indicates that children might become conscious of bodily distinctions as early as age three to five. (Drozd *et al.*, 2021)

Young children who are obese may experience social, emotional, and physical effects. When children's physical health is impacted by obesity, this raises the risk of many ailments like high blood pressure, hypertension, delayed motor development, breathing difficulties, joint and mobility issues, as well as the early onset of type 2 diabetes. Being overweight might make physical activity more difficult, which might discourage children from engaging in active play. This may set off a vicious cycle in which decreased exercise results in additional weight gain and diminished self-esteem. Being overweight might make exercise more challenging, which could lower a child's self-esteem and enthusiasm to play. (Fang *et al.*, 2019)

Obesity can also affect a child's energy levels, sleep habits, and focus. As well as a child's mood, conduct, and attention span. (Debasis Bagchi, 2011) These are all critical for successful learning and development in the early years, which may be impacted by poor sleep quality and diminished stamina. Children may find it difficult to participate completely in play-based learning activities if they are fatigued or uncomfortable.

Long Term Impact on Health and Lifestyle

The long-term effects of childhood obesity are particularly concerning. Obesity has many potential risks and consequences, The Health Foundation states that Adolescence and girls are the most affected by childhood obesity, which has a negative impact on educational attainment as compared to adolescents who maintain a healthy weight, Obese adolescents are less likely to finish their postsecondary education. Many Sources tell us that While childhood obesity has no direct impact on career outcomes, it does have an impact on young adults income, which is said that individuals who were obese as children typically make less money later in life (French et al., 2018). This information tells us that childhood obesity has long-term consequences that extend far beyond physical health, affecting education, social outcomes, and later life opportunities.

Overall, research shows that obesity affects a child's overall development and wellness, including learning, social interactions, and emotional resilience, in addition to being a physical health problem and these unhealthy habits can affect them long term. In order to encourage healthy lifestyles and positive self-esteem, early intervention and supporting behaviours are crucial in early childhood settings to prevent the risks later on in life. (Dalal et al., 2022)

Who Tells Us?

Strong evidence highlights the importance of early life experiences in shaping long-term health outcomes. Numerous institutions and experts emphasise how critical it is to treat childhood obesity. In the UK, childhood obesity prevention and management are supported by a wide range of government departments, healthcare providers, professional associations, and charitable organisations. (Goel, Reddy and Goel, 2024)

In Wales, a number of laws and public health recommendations aimed at fostering better surroundings for young children promote the fight against childhood obesity. The Welsh Government's Healthy Weight, Healthy Wales implementation plan recognises the significance of forming healthy habits from pregnancy through early children and takes a whole-system approach to lowering obesity by emphasising early years nutrition, physical activity, and family support. (World Health Organization, 2025) In order to avoid obesity and enhance children's long-term health and wellbeing, these guidelines and policies work together to support early childhood facilities and practitioners in encouraging balanced diets and active lives. (Public Health Wales, 2024) This data, together with more general studies and policy recommendations, makes it clearly apparent that childhood obesity is exceedingly dangerous and can have long-term consequences in a variety of aspects of a person's life.

Government initiatives aim to create infant feeding schedules, promote healthy eating environments, and increase family-focused, community-based programmes. In order to limit exposure to unhealthy foods that lead to obesity, Wales is also planning new Food Regulations that will limit the promotion and placement of high-fat, salt, and sugar goods. (GOV.WALES, 2025b) Additionally, Public Health Wales manages the Child Measurement Programme, which keeps track of children's weight and height at a young age in order to inform practices and policies focused on early intervention and prevention. In addition to implementing nutritional standards in schools and teaching young children the value of eating healthily, the Department of Education also set plans to expand free school lunches in 2025 and launch universal free breakfast clubs nationwide. As the governments in Wales and around the UK have introduced laws to restrict the promotion of foods rich in fat, salt, and sugar, this indicates that childhood obesity is viewed as a major public health concern rather than just a matter of personal preference. Additionally, because early weight trends frequently persist into adult life,

programs like the Child Measurement Programme show that childhood obesity is regularly monitored. Overweight children are far more likely to grow up to be overweight adults, which raises their chance of developing chronic illnesses according to numerous studies. This demonstrates how early childhood obesity can result in decreased life expectancy and long-term health disparities.

These regulations acknowledge that children's eating settings have a significant impact on their health and that early exposure to unhealthy foods can result in poor eating habits and a higher risk of obesity as an adult.

According to public health guidelines like those issued by the World Health Organisation and the NHS, childhood is a crucial time to prevent obesity. This is corroborated by research, which demonstrates that early treatments that emphasise nutrition, exercise, and family participation are more successful than attempting to modify habits later in life.

Health, Wellbeing and Inequality

Health disparities are closely linked to childhood obesity. Due to things like less availability to nutritious food and fewer opportunities for physical activity, children from lower-income homes are more likely to be obese. These disparities may contribute to a generational cycle of poor health outcomes. Therefore, preventing childhood obesity involves not only enhancing personal health but also advancing equality, inclusivity, and fair opportunities for all children. (Dixon, Peña and Taveras, 2012)

Guidelines from organisations like the World Health Organisation and the NHS state that early childhood is a critical period for development. During this stage, learning, brain development, emotional control, mental health, and physical growth can all be impacted by inactivity and poor diet. The major emphasis on early intervention, free school meals, and breakfast distribution reflects evidence that avoiding obesity early is more successful and less harmful than treating it later. This shows that childhood

obesity is a chronic problem that can affect a child's health, happiness, and possibilities in life well into adulthood. Therefore, cooperation between early childhood educators, schools, families, medical professionals, and legislators is crucial. By providing professional advice, developmental assessments, and growth monitoring to detect issues early and promote children's health and wellbeing, health visitors, nutritionists, and paediatricians play a crucial role in lowering long-term disparities. (England, 2025)

Application?

As part of their duty of care, early childhood educators are supposed to promote health and wellbeing. Therefore, providing high-quality early years care requires an awareness of obesity and how to prevent it. (Pearce *et al.*, 2010). One of the best strategies is when Practitioners Promote healthy habits instead than concentrating on weight. According to Spiga *et al.* (2024), Interventions to prevent obesity in children aged 5 to 11 years old, Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews, combined nutrition and physical activity interventions can lower children's risk of obesity, demonstrating the efficacy of integrated methods.

In order to guarantee that meals and snacks are nutritious, age-appropriate, and promote healthy growth, practitioners should adhere to national food and nutrition guidelines for childcare settings. To assist children in establishing preferences for healthy foods, this recommendation urges settings to provide a range of fruits and vegetables, healthy beverages, nutritious foods with little to no sugar or salt, and setting an example of good eating practices free from criticism or pressure. By encouraging healthy behaviours that enhance children's general welfare, early childhood educators can contribute to the prevention of obesity. (Irranca-Davies, 2018)

Early childhood educators can help prevent childhood obesity and provide support by limiting extended periods of inactivity and providing everyday chances for active play,

such as running, climbing, and dancing. This can be done both indoors and outdoors, practitioners can also promote children's health. (Saguil and Stephens, 2012)

A daily schedule that emphasises outdoor play, organised physical activities, and nutritious meals cooked in accordance with dietary guidelines could be an example of good practice in an early years setting. For instance, a nursery may give children the chance to assist with snack preparation, such as chopping fruit, which promotes independence and fine motor skills while also fostering interest in healthful meals. Including cooking in a child's daily routine will boost their confidence and interest in eating. (Kim and Park, 2020) Another excellent example is "Grow Your Own" initiatives. Children are far more likely to try new foods that they have helped grow when they are involved in gardening to grow veggies and herbs. (Rochira et al., 2020) This kind of strategy is supported by research findings. According to studies, early childhood environments that incorporate staff training, active play, and the supply of healthy foods are better at helping young children maintain a healthy weight. It has been discovered that interventions involving the family and the surroundings are very successful, underscoring the significance of a comprehensive strategy. (Gelman et al., 2023)

Intervention is less successful than prevention. Early childhood settings can help children form lifelong healthy habits by incorporating physical activity and a balanced diet into daily routines. This strategy is further strengthened by maintaining consistency between the home and the environment. This demonstrates that early years practitioners can make a meaningful difference by creating environments that support health, wellbeing, and positive lifestyle choices. (British Nutrition Foundation, n.d.)

Working with Families

Working together with parents and carers is essential. Early years practitioners may significantly contribute to avoiding childhood obesity and promoting children's long-term health and wellbeing by incorporating Welsh recommendations into everyday

practice, modelling positive behaviours, and collaborating with families in a compassionate and encouraging manner. Practitioners can assist guarantee that healthy patterns are reinforced at home and in the setting by providing information, providing support, and sensitively directing patients to health resources. Practitioners should adopt a nonjudgmental and encouraging tone, acknowledging that family situations, culture, time, and financial resources all have an impact on lifestyle decisions. Sharing clear and useful information, modelling healthy behaviours in the workplace, and directing families to the right health services, like the NHS Better Health campaign, which offers a variety of easily accessible online tools and advice or to their local GP for additional support are all ways to promote positive change. (Department of Health and Social Care, 2022)

As important as it is for practitioners to promote healthy lifestyles in setting, Collaborating with parents and carers is equally crucial. Open communication and trust are the foundation of successful partnerships, enabling parents to feel supported rather than blamed. Through casual discussions, newsletters, workshops, or the sharing of activity suggestions that families can attempt at home, practitioners can reinforce healthy messaging. Early childhood educators can support children in developing healthy routines and behaviours that contribute to their long-term health and wellbeing by working cooperatively and consistently to establish a shared approach between the home and the setting. (NHS, 2020)

Conclusion

In summary, childhood obesity is a serious health and wellness problem that, if left untreated, can have long-term effects. It is impacted by a variety of lifestyle and environmental factors and has an impact on children's physical, emotional, and social development. According to an assessment by Health and Care Research Wales, there is high-certainty evidence that encouraging opportunities for healthy eating, slowing the rate of weight increase during infancy, and allowing active play in childcare facilities are

all linked to better weight outcomes for young children. Children can develop healthy habits that last into later childhood and beyond when carers are involved and supportive diet and activity environments are provided. (Health Care Research Wales, 2023)

By supporting a healthy diet, increasing physical exercise, and collaborating with families, early childhood educators play a critical role in prevention. Early intervention in the early years can help children form good habits that enhance their overall welfare and future development, as supported by national guidelines and research findings.

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