

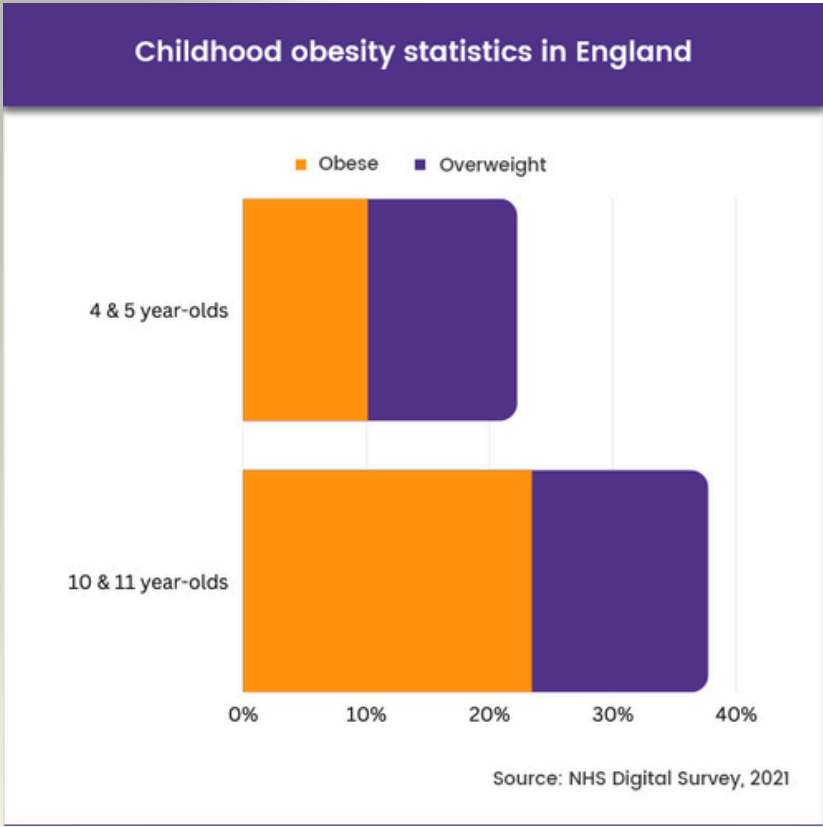
OBESEITY

In the Early Years

WHAT IS OBESITY?

“Abnormal or excessive fat accumulation that presents a risk to health”
World Health Organisation (WHO ,ND)

“Overweight and obesity are when you have more body fat than your body needs” (NHS 2026)



Healthexpress, 2024

2023-2024 - 64.5% of adults in England are overweight or obese
(Office for Health Improvement & Disparities, 2025)

10.5% of children aged 4-5 are overweight/obese

Adults	Children
0.3% Increase	Almost 1% Increase

Consequences of Obesity

Its not just about weight...



Lifestyle Factors

Excessive calorie intake

Screen time

Stress

Poor sleep

Low income

Lack of Education and
Knowledge

Lack of Exercise

Lack of food choices

Obesity has been on the rise since the 1980's (Chooi et al, 2019),

SLEEP *zzzz*

A lack of Sleep can have hormonal impacts, such as:

Impaired glucose tolerance
Increased nocturnal cortisol

Hale *et al* (2018) shows more children are having electronics in their room at night, limiting parental control and likelihood of blue light exposure within the hour of going to sleep.

CAHMS (2024) - Screens are harmful to sleep due to their addicting nature and blue light exposure



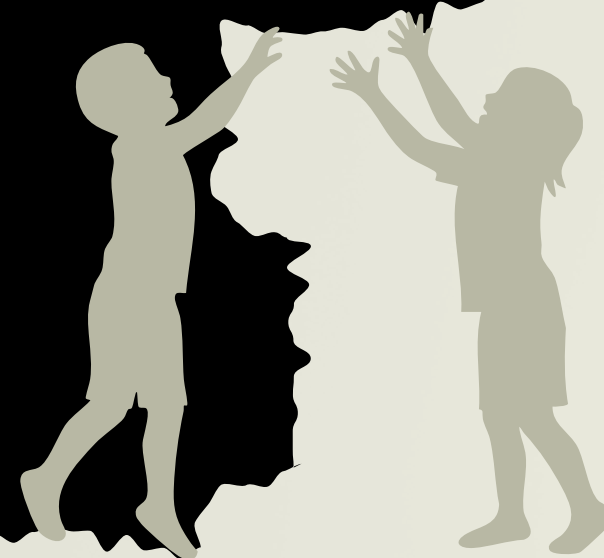
Parental Impact

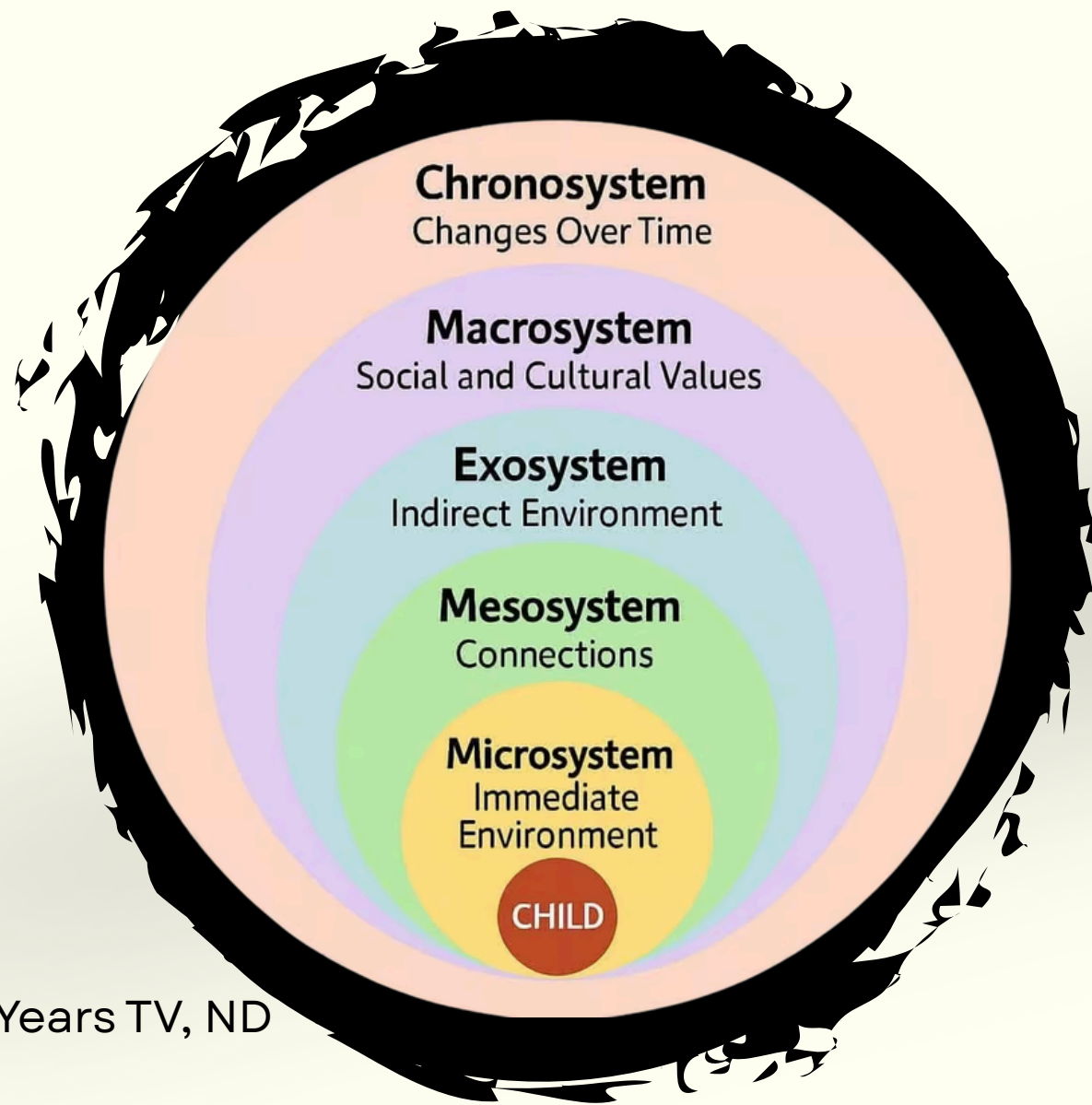
Children are cared for by adults, meaning they usually don't have control over what food is bought, what they eat, how much time they have outside, or how much exercise they get.



Parents are becoming unaware of what obesity looks like, with many parents in England not being able to identify that their own children are overweight (Reilly 2012)

Overall, obesity and being overweight has become harder to identify (Robinson *et al* 2020)





Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1994) shows how children learn from those closest to them (those in the microsystem)

Yee *et al* (2017) supports this by stating how parents have direct influence on their children's behaviours. Meaning that children pick up the habits of their parents

And these habits formed in early life are highly likely to translate into the health habits as children become adults.

Lioret *et al* (2020) claims that a person's adiposity can be predicted from their weight at ages as young as two years old.

Socio-economic Issues

Those with low socioeconomic standing are more likely to be obese (Lee *et al*, 2019).

*Families may decide to buy frozen or longer-lasting foods that can be purchased less frequently and stored for longer periods.
(Daniel 2021)*

Fresh Fruit and Vegetables	Frozen Food
Short Shelf Life	Long Shelf life
More frequent purchasing	Less frequent purchasing



Urbanisation of highly populated areas reduces the amount of green space. Those in poverty are more likely to live in heavily urbanised areas with more barriers to outdoor spaces for exercise and outdoor space to allow children to play and move their bodies.

GENETIC INPUT

Perraudin and Thomas (2018) suggest that almost 50% of parents to obese children consider their child to be of healthy, standard weight

40-70% heritability of obesity.- Institute of Health and Care Excellence (NICE, 2025)

Heritability can be between 25% up to 80% - Harvard Medical School (2019)

This suggests a wider issue...

If parents are not aware of their child obesity, how can they be expected to solve it

The University of Birmingham (ND) offers insight into why parents are unaware their children are obese; articles on obesity tend to use imagery of those on the extreme end of the scale and not those who are minimally overweight or obese.

Although genetic predisposition may increase susceptibility to obesity, the rapid increase in obesity prevalence over recent decades cannot be explained by genetics alone, the genetic makeup of humans has not had alterations that would explain such a drastic increase in obesity from one generation to the next.



“the rise of obesity has happened too quickly to be caused by genetic changes.” - Learn.Genetics (N.D)



Masood and Moorthy (2023) blend the nature versus nurture argument, combining biological, psychological and social factors, reviewing how obesity is an accumulation of a multitude of factors and ‘blame’ cannot be placed on a single factor such as genetics, mental attitudes and social environments.

WHAT SUPPORT IS AVAILABLE

Restrictions on junk food advertisement

Free breakfast clubs.

Expanded free school meals

Food for Fun

PIPYN Project
“healthy children healthy
weight”

Do

- ✓ get active every day – find an activity they enjoy, such as sports, playground activities or walking to school
- ✓ aim to give them a healthy, balanced diet that includes fruit and vegetables, starchy foods, protein and dairy or dairy alternatives
- ✓ set realistic targets and involve your child in deciding what changes you're going to make
- ✓ use rewards such as stickers or high fives when they reach their food and activity goals
- ✓ encourage a healthy attitude to eating – you can be a good role model by staying active and eating healthily
- ✓ help them get enough sleep – follow a regular bedtime routine and remove digital screens, such as mobile phones or tablets, from their bedroom at night

NHS, 2023

However.....

Although there are a variety of websites and services available many parents may not be aware of their existence, or, as discussed, not be aware they are needed.

With services such as PIPYN, parents may again not know they exist or be reliant on schools to support them in accessing these services.

Despite these barriers, Griffith et al (2018) states that these UK based incentives have made an impact on an increase in healthy food being bought.

References

BrightCanary, 2024, What Is an iPad Kid?, Available at: <https://www.brightcanary.io/ipad-kid/> (Accessed 12th June 2026)

British Ecological Society, 2024, Are green spaces accessible to people living in low-income areas?, Available at: <https://www.britishecologicalsociety.org/content/are-green-spaces-accessible-to-people-living-in-low-income-areas-heres-whats-how-to-improve-access/> (Accessed 12th June 2026)

Bronfenbrenner, U. 1994, Ecological Models of Human Development, Available at: <https://www.ncj.nl/wp-content/uploads/media-import/docs/6a45c1a4-82ad-4f69-957e-1c76966678e2.pdf> (Accessed 12th June 2026)

CAMHS (Child and Adult Mental Health Service, NHS), 2024, Sleep Difficulties, Available at: <https://oxfordhealth.nhs.uk/camhs/self-care/sleep/difficulties/screens/> (Accessed 12th June 2026)

CDC, 2025, Consequences of Obesity, Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/obesity/php/about/consequences.html> (accessed 8th June 2026)

CDC, 2025, Risk factors for Obesity, Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/obesity/risk-factors/risk-factors.html> (Accessed 29th May 2026)

Chooi, Y.C. Ding, C. and Magkos, F. (2019) The epidemiology of obesity Metabolism, 92, pp. 6–10. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.metabol.2018.09.005>. (Acccesed 1st June 2026)

Chu, J. 2025, How Childhood Messages Shape Your Inner Critic and 4 Ways to Break Free, Available at: <https://www.effectiveliving.com.au/childhood-messages-internalised/> (Accessed 12th June 2026)

Cwm Taff Morgannwg University Health Board, ND, PIPYN, Available at: <https://ctmuhb.nhs.wales/services/public-health-dietitians/pipyn/> (Accessed 1st June 2026)

Daniel, C. 2021, Is Healthy Eating Too Expensive?: How Low-Income Parents Evaluate the Cost of Food, Available at: <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7065490/> (Accessed 12th June 2026)

Department of Health and Social Care, 2025, Obesity, Physical Activity and Nutrition, Available at: <https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/profile/obesity-physical-activity-nutrition/data#page/4/gid/8000011/pat/159/par/K02000001/ati/15/are/E92000001/iid/90319/age/200/sex/4/cat/-1/ctp/-1/yr/1/cid/4/tbm/1> (Accessed 1st June 2026)

EBSCO, 2021, Nature versus nurture debate, Available at: <https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/communication-and-mass-media/nature-versus-nurture-debate> (Accessed 12th June 2026)

Early Years TV, ND, Urie Bronfenbrenner: Ecological Systems Theory and the Bioecological Model, Available at: <https://www.earlyyears.tv/urie-bronfenbrenner-ecological-systems-theory-bioecological-model/> (Accessed 12th June 2026)

Griffith, R. Hinke, S.V. Smith, S, 2018, Getting a healthy start: The effectiveness of targeted benefits for improving dietary choices, Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0167629616302533> (Accessed 12th June 2026)

Hale, L. Kirschen, GW. LeBourgeois, MK. Gradisar, M. Garrison, MM. Montgomery-Downs, H. Kirschen, H. McHale, SM. Chang, AM. Buxton, OM. 2018, Youth Screen Media Habits and Sleep: Sleep-Friendly Screen Behavior Recommendations for Clinicians, Educators, and Parents, Available at: <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC5839336/> (accessed 1st June 2026)

Harvard Medical School, 2019, Why people become overweight, Available at: <https://www.health.harvard.edu/healthy-aging-and-longevity/why-people-become-overweight> (Accessed 1st June 2026)

HealthExpress, 2024, Obesity Statistics 2024: Facts and Figures in the UK, Available at: <https://www.healthexpress.co.uk/obesity-statistics-uk> (Accessed 12th June 2026)

Learn.Genetics, ND, Evolution and Obesity, Available at: <https://learn.genetics.utah.edu/content/metabolism/obesity/> (Accessed 12th June 2026)

Lee, A. Cardel, M. Donahoo, W. 2019, Social and Environmental Factors Influencing Obesity, Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK278977/> (Accessed 12th June 2026)

Lee, JS. Jin, MH. Lee, HJ. Global relationship between parent and child obesity: a systematic review and meta-analysis. Available at: <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8743427/> (Accessed 1st June 2026)

LioRET S, Campbell KJ, McNaughton SA, Cameron AJ, Salmon J, Abbott G, Hesketh KD. 2020, Lifestyle Patterns Begin in Early Childhood, Persist and Are Socioeconomically Patterned, Confirming the Importance of Early Life Interventions, Available at: <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7146362/> (accessed 12th June 2026)

Marcus C, Danielsson P, Hagman E. 2022, Pediatric obesity-Long-term consequences and effect of weight loss. Available at: <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9805112/> (Accessed 10th June 2026)

Masood, B. and Moorthy, M. (2023) 'Causes of obesity: A review', Clinical Medicine, 23(4), pp. 284–291. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.7861/clinmed.2023-0168>. (Accessed 29th May 2026)

National Institute of Health and Care Excellence, 2025, Obesity: What are the Causes and Risk Factors?, Available at: <https://cks.nice.org.uk/topics/obesity/background-information/causes-risk-factors/> (Accessed 1st June 2026)

NHS, 2023, Advice for parents of overweight children, Available at: <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-weight/childrens-weight/advice-for-parents-overweight-children/> (Accessed 1st June 2026)

NHS, 2026, Overweight and obesity in adults, Available at: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/overweight-and-obesity/> (Accessed 29th May 2026)

Office for Health Improvement & Disparities, 2025, Obesity profile: short statistical commentary, Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/obesity-profile-may-2025-update/obesity-profile-short-statistical-commentary-may-2025> (Accessed 1st June)

Omer, T. 2020, The causes of obesity: an in-depth review, Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Tahir-Am-Omer/publication/342812303_The_causes_of_obesity_an_in-depth_review/links/5f072a2292851c52d624a874/The-causes-of-obesity-an-in-depth-review.pdf (Accessed 1st June 2026)

Perraudin, F. Thomas, T. 2018, Children of obese parents more likely to be obese, survey finds, Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/dec/04/children-of-obese-parents-more-likely-to-be-obese-survey-finds> (Accesses 1st June 2026)

Reilly, J.J. (2012) 'Evidence-based obesity prevention in childhood and adolescence: Critique of recent etiological studies, preventive interventions, and policies', *Advances in Nutrition*, Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3945/an.112.002014>. (Accessed 8th June 2026)

Robinson E, Haynes A, Sutin A, Daly M. 2020, Self-perception of overweight and obesity: A review of mental and physical health outcomes. Available at: <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7556430/> (Accessed 12th June 2026)

Segal Y, Gunturu S. 2024, Psychological Issues Associated With Obesity. Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK603747/> (Accessed 11th June 2026)

Sowers, B. 2017, The Prevalence of Bullying among Obese or Overweight Adolescents, Available at: https://www.shepherd.edu/app/uploads/2017/12/Sowers_Brooke-THESIS.pdf (Accessed 12th June 2026)

UK Government, 2025, Government acts to tackle rising childhood obesity epidemic, Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-acts-to-tackle-rising-childhood-obesity-epidemic> (Accessed 1st June 2026)

University of Birmingham, ND, Why can't parents recognise when their children are overweight or obese?, Available at: <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/research/perspective/childhood-obesity> (Accessed 1st June 2026)

Welsh Government, 2025, Healthy Weight: Healthy Wales delivery plan 2025 to 2027, Available at: <https://www.gov.wales/healthy-weight-healthy-wales-delivery-plan-2025-2027-html> (Access 12th June 2026)

World Health Organisation, ND, Obesity, Available at: https://www.who.int/health-topics/obesity#tab=tab_1 (Accessed 29th May 2026)

Yee, A.Z.H., Lwin, M.O. & Ho, S.S. 2017, The influence of parental practices on child promotive and preventive food consumption behaviors: a systematic review and meta-analysis., Available at: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/s12966-017-0501-3#citeas> (accessed 12th June 2026)