ECEY5009/C:

Wellbeing, Care and Healthy living.

Good morning, My Name is Evey Joelle Evans, student number: 2413474

Today, I would like to talk about the global issue of childhood obesity currently affecting many children around the world. This isn't just a topic about weight, it's about children's health, happiness, and the future adult chances of our children. Obesity happens for many reasons, like the food we eat, how active we are, and the world around us. However, the good news is that if we take steps early using our knowledge of early years, we can contribute to making a positive difference for children.

So what is Obesity and how do we measure obesity?

According to the NHS Wales (nodate) and Public Health Wales (2023) obesity is a medical condition where the body carries too much fat which has a negative impact on the body which leads to additional health related issues. The World Health Organisation also defines childhood obesity as "abnormal or excessive fat accumulation that presents a risk to health". Quoted by (world health organisation 2020).

Obesity is most measured using a Body Mass Index (BMI) calculator which is adjusted for male and female. Uk standards growth charts recognise overweight and obese as adolescents with a BMI equal to or greater than the 85th centile, adjusted for their age and sex (Understanding Glasgow 2015).

In Wales childhood obesity is tracked through the Public Health Child Measurement Programme aligned to the UK standards for growth (Public Health Wales 2024). Glasgow also use UK standards growth charts to measure childhood obesity (Understanding Glasgow 2015).

Is Obesity a concern?

Watkins (2024), Discuss that obesity is considered one of the most serious public health issues both in the UK and around the world, in Wales obesity rates continue to rise. The World Health Organisation share this view and suggest that childhood obesity is increasing at an alarming rate worldwide (WHO 2020). According to NHS Wales (2022), current health research shows that over a quarter of children aged 4-5 in Wales are recognised as overweight or obese. However, Carmarthenshire alone had a significantly higher percentage of 30% of children aged 4-5 which are classified as obese compared to the Welsh average, addressing these issues is essential for safeguarding the health and well-being of children in Wales (Carmarthenshire County Council 2022).

The Impact of Obesity and why we should be concerned?

Childhood obesity is linked to serious health risks, including, Type 2, heart disease, mental health challenges, Joint and bone problems, breathing difficulties and high blood pressure. It can also impact school attendance and causing bullying and harassment. Children who are obese are more likely to become adults who are obese who go on to experience significant ill health and early mortality (GOV.UK 2022).

How Can We Prevent Childhood Obesity

To understand how best to tackle childhood obesity we have to first understand the cause of the issue. Research suggests that the following factors contribute to childhood obesity,

- Lack of physical activity,
- poverty and limited safe outdoor places for exercise and play
- Sleep and Stress-Childhood Trauma,

- Genetics
- Family Influences
- Harmful Food Marketing.

(Childhood Obesity: Applying All Our Health guidance 2022).

According to Public Health Wales (nodate), Welsh Government has implemented several strategies in Wales such as education awareness, improving access to healthy food, increasing access to physical activity, early interventions, community-based interventions and reducing health problems. One of the most recent strategies aimed at tackling childhood poverty in Wales is the free school meals initiative and using the eat well plate in school. Some schools are now providing fresh fruit and milk during snack time and only allowing water into school (GOV.WALES 2024).

Physical inactivity has been identified as one of the causes of childhood obesity (GOV.UK 2022) and we must therefore recognise the importance of play in the early years and throughout childhood which develops good habits in adult life.

According to Curriculum for Wales - HWB (no date), physical play has many benefits and is particularly crucial in ensuring children live health lives. The curriculum for Wales embeds the importance of outdoor play into children's learning. Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852), was an early childhood theorist who was the founder of the Kindergarten and through his work strongly emphasised the crucial importance outdoor play Tovey, H. and Froebel Trust (no date). Regio Emila Interestingly the mane Kindergarten means garden for children. Reggio Emilia, a more recent childhood theorist, believed that outdoor physical play was essential for children's learning, viewing it as the "third teacher' (Berg,2024). Welsh Government further recognises the importance of play in tackling obesity in its Healthy Weigh Health Wales Plan (Welsh government 2022).

The Role of Early Years Childhood Theorists in Supporting Early Intervention in preventing childhood obesity.

In an article by new plan to reduce and prevent obesity in Wales by (GOV.WALES 2022). It states that it is positively reassuring to see that the Welsh Government includes early years strategies in tackling the issue of childhood obesity. This shows they understand how important the early years are for shaping healthy habits. By focusing on early intervention, the government is helping children build healthy routines from a young age. Childhood theorists over many years have highlighted the importance of nutrition in early development. Egersdorff (nodate) cites, in 1943 Maslow highlighted the importance of food and nutrition as basic survival need at the foundation of the Hierarchy of Need. Maslow suggested that nutrition was essential to a child's growth, learning, and psychological needs. Piaget also recognised the importance of nutrition in a child's cognitive development (McLeod 2025). However, although Maslow captures the importance of food and nutrition as fundamental to good health and wellbeing, but didn't state the importance of different types of nutrition for the purpose of preventing obesity.

Early childhood theorists suggest that young children learn a lot from the people around them, parents, teachers, and even society. Vygotsky highlights the importance of this, where he emphasizes that children learn through social interaction with more knowledgeable other, as he believed learning was most effective when guided by those around the child children can do more when they have guidance from an adult. By watching and imitating, they slowly learn to do things on their own, (Mind in Society 1978). This is also important when looking at ways to prevent obesity, as research has shown that habits, education, community influence, and adult behaviour all play a role in shaping a child's health. McLeod (2025) discusses that Jean Piaget focused on how children build knowledge in his Cognitive Development Theory. He believed children actively explore and learn, but he also

recognized that imitation is important, especially in the sensorimotor stage. During this early stage, babies and young children learn by copying actions they see.

According to Mantravadi (2024), Montessori also believed that children learn best through hands on experiences in learning environments structured by adults. She recognised the importance of educating children about good food choices, encouraging the child's participation in good choices so that they develop good eating habits. She suggested that adults play a key role in children's learning. She saw educators as role models, showing children how to do tasks through hands-on experiences. In her approach, children learn by watching adults.

These theories emphasise the importance of children observing imitating and learning from adults which therefore suggests that early intervention through education and positive role modelling can help children develop healthy eating habits which therefore prevent obesity. Ling, J. and Gebremariam, M. (2023), state that it is particularly relevant to understand the important role of adults in children's learning when current research identifies family influences and poor diet choice as factors that cause of obesity. Understanding these influences is key to shaping effective strategies for tackling childhood obesity. Studies have also helped guide Wales First 1000 Days programme, further reinforcing how early childhood experiences can impact a person's health and future opportunities (NHS Wales 2022).

It also important to recognise the important role of the adult and consider the impact of socioeconomic factors on the adults choices, where the adult through poverty cannot access good food to role model food choices. Socioeconomic factors are also identified through research as a cause of obesity (Public Health Wales 2023). Healthy Wales Strategy (2022) states that Welsh Government has therefore committed to reducing the imbalance in accessing and affording health food options. This is also especially important given that it is a child's right to access food and water, Article 24 Rights of the Child (UNCRC 1989).

Welsh Government recognises the importance of early childhood in shaping health and development through its Healthy Weight: Healthy Wales strategy (2022) and seven national priorities, it emphasizes the role of families and education in tackling obesity. Early years research highlights that adults play a key role in a child's learning, making their influence crucial in promoting healthy habits from a young age. World Health Organisation (2015) cites, in 2015 Finland introduced strategies that embedded the importance of the early years and the role of the parents which resulted in lowered rates of childhood obesity which were halved as a result. However, their overall rate of childhood obesity at 22% is higher than the Uks average at 7% (NHS 2024).

In recognition of the importance of the early years in tackling childhood obesity and ensuring children start school at a healthy weight Welsh Government has developed the Food and Nutrition Guidance for Childcare Providers (Department for Education 2025). From an even earlier stage within early years Welsh Government recognises that breastfeeding as a key factor in preventing childhood obesity and has developed strategies to promote and support breastfeeding, including the All Wales Breastfeeding Five-Year Action Plan (GOV.WALES 2019).

Practitioners can help reduce obesity by promoting healthy lifestyles, such as encouraging balanced diets and supporting daily physical activity. They can also implement family-focused interventions by involving parents in workshops at local Flying Start centres, where families receive guidance on meal planning and healthy cooking. In addition, Flying Start offers tea-time clubs, providing children with nutritious, home-cooked meals — a valuable support for families living in deprived circumstances (*Flying Start: quality report* | *GOV.WALES* (2024).

Conclusion

Childhood obesity is a serious issue and is now considered a global pandemic due to rising obesity rates worldwide Hennekens,. et al. (2024). Gov.uk (2022), suggests overweight children are more

likely to become overweight or obese adults, leading to serious health problems directly linked to obesity. The leading cause of death globally is heart disease, which is often linked to obesity and can result in early death. Other health issues related to obesity also contribute to shorter life (World Health Organization 2021).

However, by using research on early childhood development, we can take action to prevent obesity or provide early support to stop the problem from getting worse. Current Welsh Government strategies show that when we apply this research, we can create lasting change. Parents, teachers, policymakers, and society all play an important role in shaping healthier habits. By working together, we can build a healthier future for children.

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