



Active kids avoid later health woes

Frequent, vigorous exercise during the child and adolescent years is becoming recognized as the most effective way to prevent chronic health conditions that develop during the adult years.

Today, opportunities for vigorous physical activities too often are crowded out by time spent with computers, video games, TV watching, and even homework. Many researchers consider this overly sedentary life style to be the major cause of metabolic syndrome.

Question: What is metabolic syndrome?

Answer: Metabolic syndrome is the clustering of multiple health risk factors in one person. The specific factors include: 1) excess body weight, 2) high blood pressure, 3) elevated blood glucose, 4) high blood insulin, and 5) risky blood lipids (high cholesterol, LDL, and triglycerides along with low

HDL).

The co-existence of all of these factors in one person greatly increases the risk for developing cardiovascular disease and diabetes.

It is estimated that more than 50 million Americans have it.

Question: At what age does metabolic syndrome begin?

Answer: Researchers are finding that early signs of the syndrome can be apparent even before the teenage years.

Q: Which metabolic syndrome factors are most risky when they occur in children and adolescents?

A: Researchers have found that children with high body weight in combination with high levels of blood insulin are especially likely to develop all of the other factors of metabolic syndrome by the time they enter their early adult years.

A recent study conducted by Alan Sinaiko and colleagues

from the University of Minnesota and Wake Forest University found that certain factors at age 13 were good predictors of all the other metabolic syndrome factors developing by age 19. The most risky factor was high insulin levels in the blood at 13.

Q: How can young people prevent elevated insulin and the development of metabolic syndrome?

A: A good diet is important, but frequent participation in vigorous physical activity may be even more important. Exercise helps to control both body weight and blood levels of insulin and glucose.

Perhaps the best thing parents can do for their children is to serve as active role models and help children find a variety of enjoyable opportunities for vigorous physical activity.

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