

# spotlight on obesity

## Children's approach to preventing and treating obesity

Obesity is a complicated medical, social, and lifestyle issue for children, especially ones living in urban areas. An estimated 40-45 percent of children enrolled in the Boston Public Schools are overweight or obese. Children's Hospital Boston's focus is to develop the best practices among obesity management and prevention programs – both hospital-based and in the community – to ensure that programs are optimally effective in encouraging healthful habits among children and adolescents.

At the hospital, Children's offers two treatment programs for overweight and obese patients: the Optimal Weight for Life (OWL) program, the largest pediatric obesity clinic in New England, and the One Step Ahead (OSA) Program, part of the Children's Hospital Primary Care Center. Both programs provide children with an array of obesity prevention and management services.

Additionally, Children's Fitness in the City program supports affiliated Boston community health centers, including our own Martha Eliot, to reduce, treat and manage childhood obesity. Children's also increases access for children to participate in physical activity opportunities by providing scholarships to gym programs at local YMCA's, Go Kids Boston and Body by Brandy's. The relationships with community health centers through FIC recently enabled the OWL program to expand its services with a pilot program, providing monthly sessions at five of the FIC community health centers.

## Fitness in the City: uniting community health centers to curb obesity

Through the **Fitness in the City (FIC)** program, Children's provides assistance to 11 Boston community health centers, including the Martha Eliot, to support their efforts to reduce health disparities by providing culturally appropriate obesity prevention and management programs.

Encouraging children and families to make behavioral changes to positively affect their health is a challenge, and families often encounter a number of barriers that may keep them from addressing their weight issues. FIC aims to reduce those barriers by making it easier for health center providers to identify and manage obesity and serve more children and families. FIC works with the health centers to affect behavioral change by:

- supporting case managers to help overweight patients and their families access culturally and linguistically appropriate nutrition education and community-based physical activities.
- helping case managers monitor patient progress through goal setting and intake and exit surveys to assess behavioral change in the participating children.
- training and supporting each health center to record and track Body Mass Index (BMI) of its pediatric patients as well as other data on healthful eating and exercise habits.
- collecting information to begin measuring the effectiveness of FIC programs in achieving their goals; preliminary outcomes have shown that children in FIC spend less time watching TV, consume less sugar-sweetened beverages and exercise more.

Through FIC, community health centers have been able to reach over 800 children.

### BY THE NUMBERS

**45%** of children in the Boston Public Schools are overweight or obese

**500** children treated in OWL

**11** health centers supported by Children's

**343** free gym memberships provided to families

**30** providers and staff from community health centers actively involved in Fitness in the City

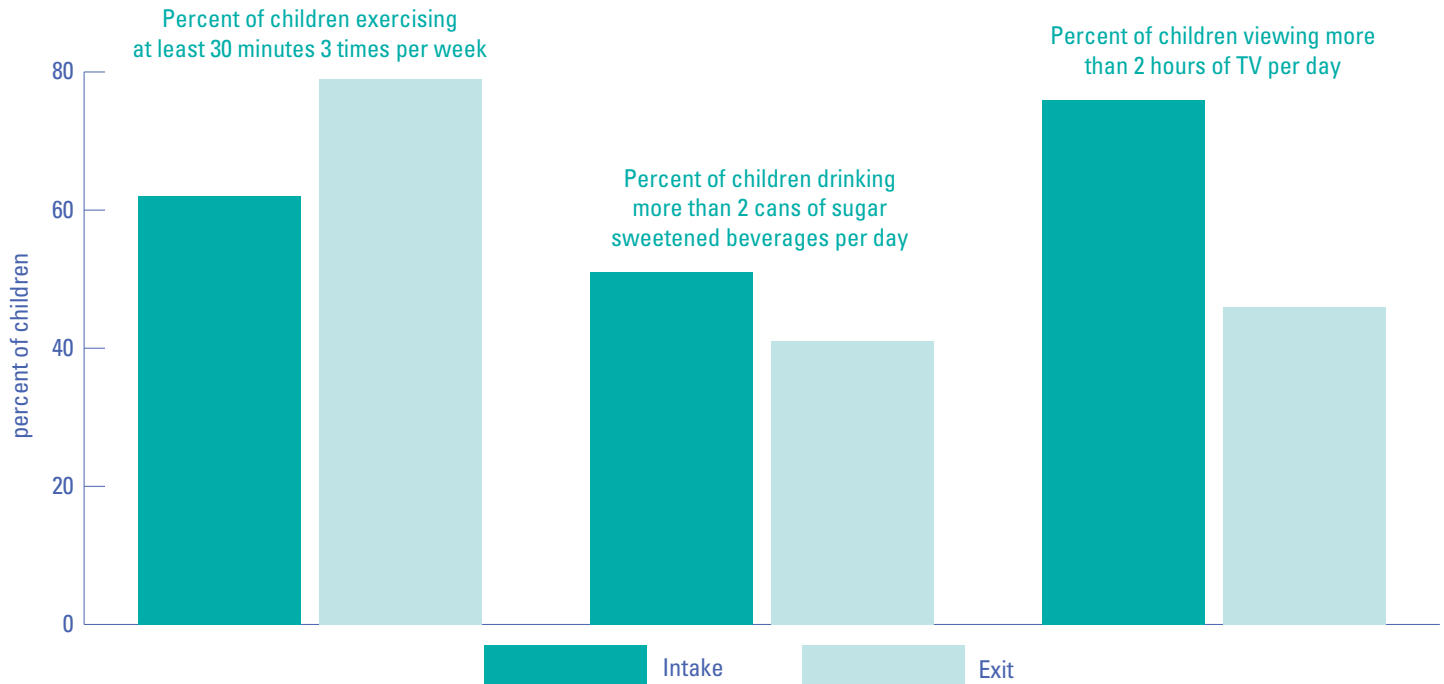
**800** children reached through FIC

### Fitness in the City participating sites

- Bowdoin Street Health Center
- Brookside Community Health Center
- The Dimock Center
- Joseph M. Smith Community Health Center
- Martha Eliot Health Center
- One Step Ahead at Children's Hospital Primary Care Center
- Roxbury Comprehensive Community Health Center
- South Cove Community Health Center
- South End Community Health Center
- Southern Jamaica Plain Health Center
- Upham's Corner Health Center
- Whittier Street Health Center



Children participating in the Fitness in the City (FIC) program have reported making some of the behavioral changes needed to combat overweight and obesity (FY08).



## Preventing obesity at an early age

In partnership with the Boston Red Sox and Northeastern University, Children’s recently launched a pilot program called “Healthy Kids, Healthy Futures” to prevent childhood obesity by promoting healthy eating and physical activity among children living in the Fenway, Mission Hill, South End and lower Roxbury communities. The program partners with Action for Boston Community Development (ABCD) Head Starts and the Boston Centers for Youth and Families (BCYF) to provide nutrition workshops and open gym sessions for families.

## Providing resources to keep families motivated

Once families have been motivated to change behavior and improve their health, it is important that resources be provided to keep them on track. Through FIC, Children’s is working to educate families on healthful habits in a number of ways:

- trainings are available to educate health center providers on updated pediatric obesity treatment and prevention techniques.
- a resource specialist helps connect providers and families to low-cost physical activity opportunities.
- a resource guide is available for providers with information on the many safe physical activity opportunities in Boston for families.
- a brochure, “10 Simple Tips to Keep Your Family Healthy,” can be found at all FIC sites and provides suggestions for how families can eat more healthfully and be more physically active.

## Moving ahead

Children’s efforts to treat and prevent childhood obesity are centered around identifying best practices, supporting community health centers and encouraging families to lead healthy, active lives. The hospital is working with FIC sites to improve data collection to show the long-term results for implementing behavioral changes. In addition, Children’s will continue to work with advocacy partners to push for healthier nutrition standards and access to physical education in schools. Later this year, the hospital is planning to launch a social marketing campaign to increase awareness about healthful habits and community resources with the goal to influence behavior change.

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