

## **Atrium Health Navicent Pediatricians Want Parents to Encourage Healthy Habits to Fight Childhood Obesity**

*More than 14.7 U.S. children suffer from obesity*

**MACON, Ga., Sept. 18, 2024** – In observance of Pediatric Obesity Awareness Month this September, Atrium Health Navicent encourages parents to not only make healthy eating, sleep and exercise habits a priority for their children, but for the entire family to help set children on a path for a healthier future.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 14.7 million children and adolescents in the U.S. suffer from obesity, and 19.7 percent of children are considered obese. In Georgia, 33.9 percent of children ages 10 to 17 are obese, higher than the national average of 33.5 percent, according to America's Health Rankings.

The World Health Organization considers childhood obesity one of the most serious public health challenges of the 21st century and childhood obesity rates have tripled in the U.S. over the past 30 years.

The CDC defines childhood obesity as adolescents with a body mass index at or above the 95th percentile for children of the same age and sex. Obesity can harm nearly every system in a child's body including the heart and lungs, muscles and bones, and the hormones that control blood sugar and puberty.

"Obesity is so dangerous for children," said [Dr. Yameika Head](#), clinical practice director of Pediatrics at Atrium Health Navicent. "It can lead to an increased risk in breathing difficulties, fractures, type 2 diabetes and high blood pressure. For this reason, it's so important for parents to model and encourage healthy habits for their children, so that they can grow up to be healthy and happy adults themselves. One way to stay on top of things is by maintaining your child's annual check-up, where physicians can spot signs of obesity early, and help with a path back to a healthy weight."

Many factors contribute to childhood obesity, including genetics, eating patterns, physical activity levels and sleep routines.

Here are some ways parents and caregivers can help children achieve a healthy weight and establish lifelong healthy habits:

- Adults should model healthy eating patterns, including a variety of vegetables, fruits, whole grains, lean proteins and low-fat and fat-free dairy products. Half of a child's plate should be filled with fruits and vegetables. Replace sugary drinks with water, 100 percent juice or low-fat milk.
- Exercise as a family. Suggestions include walking a pet before and after school, ride a bike, active chores like washing a car, vacuuming or raking leaves, and outdoor games that involve lots of movement. Children should get 60 minutes of exercise daily.
- Keep a consistent sleep schedule, even on weekends and holidays. Preschoolers need 11 to 13 hours of sleep daily, including naps. Children aged 6 to 12 need nine to 12 hours and youth aged 13 to 18 need eight to 10 hours.
- Plan family time and reduce screen time which has been associated with poor sleep, weight gain and poor mental health. Suggestions include playing a board game together, reading to young children, cooking together or making a craft.

Atrium Health Navicent's "Healthy Me" clinic is dedicated to helping children and teenagers achieve a healthy weight by providing support for weight loss and health education. Available services include counseling, sessions with a registered dietician, weight loss medications and regular monitoring by pediatricians who can help spot trouble areas before they become major health issues. In-person and virtual visits are offered. For children aged 13 and older who meet certain

criteria, Atrium Health Levine Children's also offers adolescent bariatric surgery in a program that's been verified by the American College of Surgeons as a center of excellence.

The Healthy Me clinic is a service of Atrium Health Levine Children's Beverly Knight Olson Children's Hospital. For more information about services available for children, or to find a doctor, visit [childrenshospitalnh.org](http://childrenshospitalnh.org).

#### **About Atrium Health Navicent**

Atrium Health Navicent is the leading provider of health care in central and south Georgia and is committed to its mission of elevating health and well-being through compassionate care. Atrium Health Navicent is part of [Advocate Health](#), which is headquartered in Charlotte, North Carolina, and is the third-largest nonprofit health system in the United States, created from the combination of Atrium Health and Advocate Aurora Health. Atrium Health Navicent provides high-quality, personalized care in 53 specialties at more than 50 facilities throughout the region. As part of the largest, integrated, nonprofit health system in the Southeast, it is also able to tap into some of the nation's leading medical experts and specialists with Atrium Health, allowing it to provide the best care close to home – including advanced innovations in virtual medicine and care. Throughout its 125-year history in the community, Atrium Health Navicent has remained dedicated to enhancing health and wellness for individuals throughout the region through nationally recognized quality care, community health initiatives and collaborative partnerships. It is also one of the leading teaching hospitals in the region, helping to ensure viability for rural health care for the next generation. For more information, please visit [www.NavicentHealth.org](http://www.NavicentHealth.org).

#### **About Advocate Health**

[Advocate Health](#) is the third-largest nonprofit integrated health system in the United States – created from the combination of Advocate Aurora Health and [Atrium Health](#). Providing care under the names [Advocate Health Care](#) in Illinois, Atrium Health in the Carolinas, Georgia and Alabama, and [Aurora Health Care](#) in Wisconsin, Advocate Health is a national leader in clinical innovation, health outcomes, consumer experience and value-based care. Headquartered in Charlotte, North Carolina, Advocate Health services nearly 6 million patients and is engaged in hundreds of clinical trials and research studies, with [Wake Forest University School of Medicine](#) serving as the academic core of the enterprise. It is nationally recognized for its expertise in cardiology, neurosciences, oncology, pediatrics and rehabilitation, as well as organ transplants, burn treatments and specialized musculoskeletal programs. Advocate Health employs 155,000 teammates across 69 hospitals and over 1,000 care locations and offers one of the nation's largest graduate medical education programs with over 2,000 residents and fellows across more than 200 programs. Committed to providing equitable care for all, Advocate Health provides more than \$6 billion in annual community benefits.

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