

Book Review

Burniat W, Cole T, Lissau I, Poskitt E, eds. *Child and Adolescent Obesity. Causes and Consequences, Prevention and Management*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002. US\$90, hardcover, 416 pp. ISBN 0-521-65237-5

This book examines the epidemiology, sociology and pathology behind childhood obesity. The volume includes 21 chapters by authors who are experts in the management of childhood obesity. Many of the authors are members of the European Childhood Obesity Group, an international group of paediatric health professionals working with obese children.

The book is divided into three sections. The first part, comprising six chapters, focuses on the causes of paediatric obesity. The topics range from the measurement of body fat and definition of obesity, to epidemiology, molecular and biological factors regulating body energy stores, nutrition, physical activity and psychosocial factors as causes of obesity. Measurement techniques, indices and cut-off points are discussed and a table is included of international body mass index cut-off points for overweight and obesity by sex and age (2–18 years). In the chapter on nutrition, the role of excess protein intake in the development of adipose tissue hyperplasia is discussed, along with the lack of clear evidence of a role for high energy and fat intakes as a cause of childhood obesity.

The second section addresses the consequences of childhood obesity, including clinical features and clinical obesity-associated syndromes, hormonal and metabolic changes associated with obesity and the risk of cardiovascular complications. Although psychosocial problems are identified as the most prevalent form of morbidity associated with childhood obesity, these problems are discussed in only two paragraphs in the chapter on clinical features, adverse effects and outcome. More attention is, however, paid to the psychological aspects of the obese adolescent.

The third part of this book includes 10 chapters addressing the prevention and management of paediatric obesity. The authors have tried to focus not only on what to do to prevent obesity, but also on how and by whom

(family, school, health professionals, government and industry). Those working with obese children will find the chapters on home-based care and management through activity especially practical. Positive and negative effects of dieting are discussed in the chapter on dietary management and nutritional guidelines are proposed for balanced normal-calorie diets, as well as low-calorie and very-low-calorie diets. The chapter on psychotherapy includes examples of how to use different types of question (linear, circular, reflexive) in the management of obesity in family therapy. Few drug treatments are currently recognised for use in children, but a short chapter on drug therapy gives indications for eventual drug support in childhood obesity. The last three chapters present the integration of the different components 'to create a harmonious solution to a multifaceted problem' and to speculate about future developments. The author of the last chapter, WPT James, expresses the hope that this book will encourage new avenues of research.

All chapters are well referenced and provide a comprehensive source of current information on the complex problem of child and adolescent obesity for students, researchers and health professionals. Each chapter is complete in itself and there is no unnecessary repetition. However, more attention could have been paid to the topic of psychosocial problems, the most prevalent form of morbidity associated with childhood obesity.

This book is aimed at researchers and health professionals in the field of child obesity, but will be useful for scientists in related areas to raise awareness of the problems of the obese. The authors encourage society to create communal environments that facilitate lifestyles which discourage the development of obesity.

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