

## Task Force Issues Draft Recommendation Statement on Interventions for High Body Mass Index in Children and Adolescents

*Behavioral interventions can help children and teens with a high BMI manage their weight and stay healthy*

WASHINGTON, D.C. – December 12, 2023 – The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force) today posted a draft recommendation statement on interventions for high body mass index (BMI) in children and adolescents. The Task Force recommends clinicians provide or refer children and teens with a high BMI to intensive, comprehensive behavioral interventions. **This is a B grade.**

This recommendation applies to children and adolescents age 6 years and older with a high BMI. Nearly 20% of children and teens in the United States have a high BMI, sometimes referred to as having obesity. BMI is calculated from a child's height and weight and is plotted on a growth chart. Obesity is defined as a BMI at or above the 95th percentile for age and sex on the growth chart.

"There are proven ways that clinicians can help the many children and teens who have a high BMI to manage their weight and stay healthy," says Task Force member Katrina E. Donahue, M.D., M.P.H. "Intensive behavioral interventions are effective in helping children achieve a healthy weight, while improving quality of life."

Comprehensive, intensive behavioral interventions may include education about healthy eating habits, counseling on behavioral change techniques, such as goal setting and problem solving, and supervised exercise sessions. Effective interventions include at least 26 or more hours with a healthcare professional over one year, which requires commitment from children and their families. This recommendation is for children and adolescents with a high BMI, but the Task Force encourages all kids and their families to follow healthy habits.

"There are a variety of effective, evidence-based interventions that can help children and teens maintain a healthy weight," says Task Force member John M. Ruiz, Ph.D. "Healthcare professionals should work with children and their families to find the intervention that is the best fit."

The Task Force also reviewed evidence on weight loss medications but found that more research is needed to fully understand the long-term health outcomes for medications. Other important areas of research gaps identified by the Task Force include how change in BMI impacts overall, long-term health and how clinicians can best talk to children, adolescents, and their families about weight loss. These gaps are particularly important to address in populations with the highest rates of high BMI, which include Hispanic/Latino, Native American/Alaska Native, and non-Hispanic Black children and adolescents and children from lower-income families.

The Task Force's draft recommendation statement and draft evidence review have been posted for public comment on the Task Force website at <https://www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org>. Comments can be submitted from December 12, 2023, through January 16, 2024, at <https://www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org/tfcomment.htm>.

### Grade in this recommendation:

B: Recommended.

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The Task Force is an independent, volunteer panel of national experts in prevention and evidence-based medicine that works to improve the health of people nationwide by making evidence-based recommendations about clinical preventive services such as screenings, counseling services, and preventive medications.

Dr. Donahue is a professor and vice chair of research at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Department of Family Medicine. She is a family physician and senior research fellow at the Cecil G. Sheps Center for Health Services Research and the co-director of the North Carolina Network Consortium, a meta-network of six practice-based research networks and four academic institutions in North Carolina.

Dr. Ruiz is a professor of clinical psychology in the Department of Psychology at the University of Arizona, where he is also director of diversity, equity, and inclusivity.

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