

News Release

The Injured Obese Child: Let's Give Him Some Ankle Support

Obese Children are More Likely to Suffer from Lower Body Injuries

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CINCINNATI – In comparison to non-obese children, obese children are significantly more likely to have lower body injuries, such as in their ankles and legs. The Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center study, which was conducted to determine if different body parts are injured in obese children compared to non-obese children so that prevention strategies can be developed, will be presented May 2 at the annual meeting of the Pediatric Academic Societies in Baltimore.

“The most common lower body injuries were sprains,” said Wendy Pomerantz, MD, emergency medicine physician and lead author of the study. “Because obese patients have an increased body mass and force, they are more likely to twist or roll on a lower extremity and cause injury than the non-obese children. Other injuries that the patients experienced were fractures and lacerations.”

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, obese children and adolescents are more likely to have risk factors associated with cardiovascular disease such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and Type 2 diabetes than are other children and adolescents.

The study that Dr. Pomerantz and her team conducted included 23,349 children who visited the Cincinnati Children's emergency department for an injury from Jan. 1, 2005, to March 31, 2008. The average age of the children was approximately eight years. Some 16.5 percent of those observed were obese.

According to Dr. Pomerantz, childhood obesity not only puts children at a greater risk for injuries but it also prolongs recovery time. “Though it is not well studied, we suspect that increased force due to increased weight puts undue strain on the ligaments, tendons, muscles, joints and bones of these particular children. Repetitive forces with increased weight likely results in more damage to their bodies and lengthy recovery times,” she said.

Dr. Pomerantz said that as obesity continues to increase in the US, doctors and care providers are likely to see more of these injuries. With weight loss and exercise, however, these children may be able to prevent getting hurt.

“The best advice for parents of an obese child who want the child to exercise but is afraid of the child getting injured should work with a specialist to get a tailored diet and exercise regimen to help them lose weight,” said Dr. Pomerantz. “There are different kinds of programs across the country, such as Cincinnati Children’s HealthWorks! Program, that work with children to assist them with achieving their weight loss goals.” She added that one of the most important things for parents to remember that every little bit of dieting and exercise will help their child lose weight.

The PAS meeting, sponsored by the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Pediatric Society, the Society for Pediatric Research and the Ambulatory Pediatric Association, is the largest international meeting to focus on research in child health.

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Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center is one of America's top three children's hospitals for general pediatrics and is highly ranked for its expertise in digestive diseases, respiratory diseases, cancer, neonatal care, heart care and neurosurgery, according to the annual ranking of best children's hospitals by U.S. News & World Report. One of the three largest children's hospitals in the U.S., Cincinnati Children's is affiliated with the University of Cincinnati College of Medicine and is one of the top two recipients of pediatric research grants from the National Institutes of Health.

For its achievements in transforming healthcare, Cincinnati Children's is one of six U.S. hospitals since 2002 to be awarded the American Hospital Association-McKesson Quest for Quality Prize ® for leadership and innovation in quality, safety and commitment to patient care. The hospital is a national and international referral center for complex cases, so that children with the most difficult-to-treat diseases and conditions receive the most advanced care leading to better outcomes. Additional information can be found at www.cincinnatichildrens.org.