



The Physicians' Role in Preventing Childhood Overweight and Obesity

Childhood overweight and obesity are now widely recognized as a growing health problem in the United States. Most family physicians, pediatricians, and other health care providers know the importance of sound nutrition and regular physical activity in helping to prevent childhood obesity. And, they understand the chronic, life-threatening problems that can result if it is left untreated. Many are taking steps to help their patients understand the importance of making healthy lifestyle choices.

This is why the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP) fitness initiative Americans in Motion (AIM) are partnering with the National Institutes of Health (NIH) on the **We Can!** program. **We Can!** stands for **W**ays to **E**nhance **C**hildren's **A**ctivity and **N**utrition that focuses on three important behaviors: improved food choices, increased physical activity and reduced screen time. The AAP and AAFP want to work together with the NIH to help families understand how energy balance affects weight and how health-promoting energy balance can be achieved.

WHAT IS **WE CAN!**

We Can! is a turn-key childhood overweight and obesity prevention program with evidence-based materials that are flexible and easy-to-use. Currently, over 140 communities around the country are participating in **We Can!** programs for parents and youth. These community groups range from hospitals, health departments, clinics, faith-based organizations, YMCAs, schools, etc. Abstracts from community sites that are actively implementing the program and ideas for how various community groups can get involved in the program are available on the Web site at <http://wecan.nhlbi.nih.gov>

We Can! offers community groups a wide array of materials and resources to help them implement the program. They include a curriculum to use with parents and other primary caregivers of children, science-based curricula to use with youth, and a community toolkit to promote the formation and growth of local "action" coalitions. The program is also reaching out directly to parents with products such as the **We Can! Families Finding the Balance: Parent Handbook**, as well as helpful hints and tip sheets. These products are also largely available on the **We Can!** Web site.

HOW YOU CAN BE INVOLVED

In your practice: Family physicians, pediatricians and other health care providers are a trusted source of health information and guidance. In your clinical practice, you are able to identify at-risk children and youth whose parents or other caregivers can most benefit from that guidance. Within the time constraints of a busy practice, there are a number of things you can do:

- Provide parents a copy of **Healthy Families, Healthy Weight** (available in the Health Care Providers section of "Get Involved" on the **We Can!** Web site) and review the suggestions.





- Suggest that parents get a free copy of the **We Can!** Parents Handbook by calling the toll free number 1-866-35-WECAN. Or, better yet, order the hand books for a nominal fee and go over it with your patients.
- Refer parents to the **We Can!** Web site and tell them to search for a local **We Can!** community site where they and their children can learn about ways to maintain a healthy weight. (Go to the Find **We Can!** Communities in the “Get Involved” section of the Web site to find out if there’s a program in your area.)
- Display **We Can!** materials, such as posters and tip sheets, in your office and waiting areas.

In your community: Both AAP and AAFP have made recent Recommendations on Overweight and Obesity:

- ⇒ AAP noted that “Physicians can be instrumental in the development of active school communities by advocating for policy changes...that support healthy nutrition, reducing sedentary time, and increasing physical activity.”
- ⇒ AAFP noted that “Family physicians should participate in local, state and national efforts to improve general nutrition and improve physical activity for both children and adults.”

Working with your state or local professional organization to bring about these policies is a key role you can play in the community. You can also:

- Find out if there is a **We Can!** site in your community, and offer to serve as a resource or spokesperson.
- If there is no **We Can!** site or program available, you can start one. Talk to an appropriate community organization whom you could partner with and work together on bringing **We Can!** to your community. The local YMCA, Park and Recreation Department, faith-based organization, or school system are good places to start.
- **We Can!** provides you with the tools to help you inform others in your community on the importance of this national effort. The **We Can!** community toolkit, promotional videotape, and PowerPoint presentation are all available to use. They highlight the scientific evidence related to the growing childhood overweight and obesity problem as well as outline program strategies for community action. Additional resources are available in the “Get Involved” section of the **We Can!** Web site
- Encourage and support your professional organization’s participation in **We Can!**—at the local as well as national level.

Help us bring **We Can!** to your patients, to your community, and to your families. You too can play an important role in helping to curb the epidemic of childhood overweight and obesity.

For more information about **We Can!** go to <http://wecan.nhlbi.nih.gov> or call 1-866-35-WECAN.

