

# Impact of eating behavior on growth retardation in children

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## Introduction

Weight problem in children is very common these days. Children under or overweight is a severe health problem. These conditions can be lead to many chronic diseases in the future. Research has shown that lower BMI in children can lead to risk factors of coronary heart diseases in the future.

Behavioral research has also shown that weight problems in children are related to their eating behavior and appetite. The weight problem in children arises early in life, as the first few years of life are of rapid growth. Moreover, young children go through many changes in their digestive behavior and eating patterns. Sometimes they want to eat more, and sometimes they want nothing. These eating behaviors in children can cause growth retardation.<sup>1</sup>

## What is growth retardation

Growth retardation is when the child is not growing at a standard rate according to its age. This condition can be caused due to many various reasons; it can be due to growth hormone deficiency or lack of proper nutrition. However, if the child gets early treatment and proper nutrition, it can reach a standard growth rate.

So if you see that your child is smaller than other children of their age, he may have a growth problem. Moreover, consider taking medical attention if he is smaller than 95% of children of his age. And his growth rate is slow as growth retardation can be diagnosed in children whose height and growth are not normal.

## Symptoms related to growth retardation

Different children show different symptoms depending upon the causes of their slow growth.

1. In the form of dwarfism, the size of hands, arms, and legs may be smaller than normal.
2. In lower levels, hormone thyroxine may face loss of energy, constipation, dry skin, dry hair.
3. A low level of growth hormone, which affects the growth of the face, causes abnormality in looking young.
4. Growth retardation can also be caused by stomach or bowel disease. The blood comes from stool during constipation, diarrhea, or nausea.

## Causes of growth retardation

There are many different causes of growth retardation; the most common are: 1-Family history:

If the parents or other family members are short statures, then it is common for the child to have a slower growth rate than other children of his age. A slower growth rate due to family history is not any significant health problem as it is due to his genetics.

**Houria Makhlouki,<sup>1</sup> Ali Jafri,<sup>2</sup> Maria Arbaoui,<sup>1</sup> Abdelfetah Derouiche<sup>1</sup>**<sup>1</sup>Ben M'Sik Faculty of Science, Hassan II University, Casablanca, Morocco<sup>2</sup>Faculty of Medicine, Mohammed VI University of Health Sciences - Casablanca, Morocco**Correspondence:** Houria Makhlouki, Ben M'Sik Faculty of Science, Hassan II University, Casablanca, Morocco, Email makhlouki.houri@gmail.com**Received:** December 21, 2022 | **Published:** January 05, 2023

## Delay of constitutional growth

Sometimes children grow at a normal rate but are shorter than the average children. They have delayed bone age. This means the rate of the growth of their bones is slow, and these will be mature at a slower rate. They also reach puberty later than other of their friends. They have below-average height, but they catch up with other kids in adulthood.

## Deficiency of growth hormone

In normal children, the growth hormone is responsible for the growth of body tissues in the body. But the growth, mentally disabled children have a deficiency of growth hormone, which delays their healthy growth rate.

## Hypothyroidism

It is a condition in which the thyroid glands are not inactive state. These are the glands that are responsible for releasing the hormone that promotes growth. So if a child is not showing any growth, there is also a possibility that he has hypothyroidism.

## Poor nutrition

There are a lot of countries in the world in which people are not able to get proper food, and thousands of children are dying due to this lack of food and poor nutrition. This poor nutrition can also be a cause of low growth or growth retardation.

## Several other common symptoms:

- i. Any digestive or kidney disease
- ii. Skeletal dysplasia, lower bone growth
- iii. Sickle cell anemia
- iv. Severe stress
- v. Use of drugs by mother during pregnancy of that child
- vi. Lack of proper diet

## Diagnosis of growth retardation

The diagnosis of growth retardation is as important as its treatment. So, if you see any of the above symptoms in your child, consult the doctor. The doctor will run the test for the diagnosis. An x-ray can provide great information about the child's bone growth and development. A blood test can be run to check the hormone imbalance.

The doctor will get the information about family health and history and may also run some tests. Doctors may also ask some questions related to the family: the pregnancy period of that child, child weight at birth, height and weight of other family members, any other child who experienced growth retardation, the diet and nutrition of the child, and physical activities of that child.<sup>3</sup>

## The link between eating behavior and growth retardation

As many factors can be a cause of growth retardation in children, one of the most common reasons behind the growth retardation in children of 7-12 years old is their eating behavior.

Not all children have good eating habits. An unhealthy lifestyle and eating can also cause growth retardation as this food can reduce the growth hormone. A normal child has a healthy eating behavior consisting of various nutritious foods and in the right amounts.

Not only children, but it is the responsibility of parents to ensure a balanced diet for their children to grow properly. This can be a great challenge because preparing snacks and delicious meals do not mean children will eat them.

In fact, young children from 7–12 years old develop eating behaviors very fast, which concerns the parents.

## Common types of eating behaviors in children

Young children mostly have two types of eating behaviors in their early years of life: food jags and food aversion.

### Food jags

The child only wants to eat single food, meal after meal in this eating behavior. The best thing to do with such children is to offer a variety of nutritious foods. You can offer the desired food of your child with some nutritious choices. For example, if he likes to eat a sandwich for breakfast, dinner, and lunch. Then you can make an egg sandwich for breakfast, and at lunch, you can add some veggies to the sandwich. And at dinner, you can add some lean meat to his sandwich. In this way, your child will get nutritious food and also his favorite.

But it is also essential to introduce new choices to your child. So do that as well. Offer him some new food whenever he is eating his favorite one.

### Food aversion

One of the most common issues that every parent face is their child is not ready to eat any kind of new food. This is not a big deal because it is another children's eating behavior at that age. First of all, you should not have to force, threaten or bribe your child to try something new. Instead, expose new food to them regularly. This will give the child a chance to sample new food.

In that way, there are more chances that the child will taste and accept the new food, making the meal easier for them and their parents. Parents should adopt healthy eating habits also because the child will like to eat the foods that they see their parents eating.<sup>4</sup>

## The reason behind the eating behavior of children

Eating behaviors are part of child development. Kids can be stubborn, especially when it comes to eating. But sometimes, the child is not giving up his particular eating behavior, which can be physical or mental.

Maybe your child is not eating well because he has some issues at school, or sometimes family issues can also disturb the child's eating behavior. Some children lose their appetite entirely and do not like to eat anything because of any stressful condition.

But the good thing is that refusal in this kind of situation is just temporary. Talking to the child and making him feel good can help develop good eating behavior.

## Consequences of persistent eating behavior

Sometimes children develop a preserving eating behavior, which can also lead the child toward food intake disorder. This happens when food refusal can lead the child to nutritional and energy deficiencies.

Children having such trouble can have a low growth rate, and this avoidance of food can also affect the other aspect of their life, such as school and relationships with parents and family. This food disorder can also cause other health conditions like: Low body temperature, extreme weight loss, fainting, hair loss, slow growth, anxiety, underweight, vomiting activity.

If you face any of these conditions in your child, then consult the doctor before it can lead to any kind of growth retardation.

## How to develop healthy eating habits in children

The first thing you can do to develop a healthy eating behavior in your child is to adopt a healthy eating habit yourself. Because the children look up to their parents and follow them, so try to consume healthy and nutritious food at meals, so that your children will also eat with you and get all the nutrition.

Involve the children in preparing meals, like washing, sorting, and stirring. This will increase their interest in that food, and they will also like to eat that. Avoid highly processed food in front of children. Use healthy snacks like fruit, cheese, vegetables, hummus, yogurt, and milk instead of junk foods. There are a lot of other things that you can do to adopt healthy eating in your child: give a small portion to your child, serve a variety of foods, make meals a family time, try something new all time, do not control your child food choices, and do not make him eat differently.

## Conclusion

These all actions can make your child adopt a healthy eating pattern. And if a child has healthy eating habits, then there is a possibility of reducing growth retardation because healthy food can provide all kinds of nutrition necessary for a child's growth and development.<sup>2</sup>

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## Conflicts of interest

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