

News For

SWIM PARENTS

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5101 NW 21 Ave., Suite 200

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Are Ideal Weight Charts Meaningful?

By Keith B. Wheeler, Ph.D.

And Angeline M. Cameron

Question: A 10 year-old child who swims for times a week for 90 minutes weighs more than the published "ideal weight" for his age and height, but the child does not appear to be overweight. Are ideal weight charts meaningful? Should the child be placed on a diet?

Answer: Ideal weight charts are only applicable for people who are 18 years of age and older. Growth charts are used for people younger than 18 years. Growth charts express a percentile rank of height, weight, or height-to-weight ratio. Using growth charts, doctors can compare a child's development growth pattern with population norms. Just because a child is in the 95th percentile for weight does not necessarily indicate that the child is overweight. It is possible for a child 10 to 12 years of age to drop from the 95th percentile of weight to the 50th percentile during 1 year of rapid growth. A child who is in the upper percentiles of weight should not automatically be placed on a diet. A restrictive diet could be more harmful than helpful for a child who is preparing for puberty. If they feel that their child is overweight, the parents should discuss the issue with their child's doctor; but, if the child does not appear to be overweight, chances are that he or she is not.

Join Swim Team to Lose Weight?

By Guy Edson

Question: We are signing up our 10 year old boy for the swim team to lose weight. What can we expect?

Answer: Losing weight requires a combination of exercise and calorie reduction through controlled and monitored dieting. Of the two: dieting and exercise -- dieting is by far the most important element. Exercise is great for improving cardio-vascular fitness and strength, but as a weight loss tool, falls far short of most people's expectations.

Continuous moderate freestyle swimming for a child weighing 130 to 150 pounds will burn about 500 calories per hour. If the child attends 5 practices of 1 hour each that would be 2500 calories. To lose one pound of weight, a person needs to burn 3500 calories so that would take about 7 practices or about a week and a half.

However, a novice swimmer is not going to be swimming moderate freestyle continuously for an hour. There is going to be a lot of stroke work, easy swimming, and waiting for their turn. A novice swimmer might be burning 250 calories an hour which means it will take 14 practices, or almost three weeks, to burn off 1 pound.

So the answer to what can you expect is this: Expect a very slow reduction in weight – and ONLY if the child doesn't increase their caloric intake.

My strongest recommendation is to get with a pediatrician or a licensed dietitian to recommend, monitor and control your child's diet. Dieting is the primary means of losing weight.