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## Childhood obesity weighs on benefit budgets

### WEB EXCLUSIVE

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November 2, 2009

The calories are adding up in too many children's daily lives, adversely affecting their health, happiness – and ultimately, Corporate America's benefits budgets.

Childhood obesity weighs heavily on the financial scales when it leads to increased health care utilization and [higher costs for employers](#). Further, poor child health will decrease employee productivity as working parents often must leave early or be absent to care for their child.

The severity of the problem has dramatically increased, as studies have shown a tripling of childhood obesity in the United States over the past 30 years. Nearly one-third of children in the country are now considered either overweight or obese, the highest percentage of overweight youth in the nation's history.

"There is a great deal at stake for U.S. employers," says Helen Darling, President of the [National Business Group on Health](#), whose members include 280 large U.S. employers. "An obese teenager has a 70 percent chance of [becoming] an obese adult. And with health care for obesity-related illnesses costing employers at least \$45 billion annually, the price tag of this childhood epidemic could become unaffordable if we don't change course."

The Business Group has developed a [toolkit](#) to help U.S. employers address the growing problem of overweight and obese children with the support of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources Services Administration's Maternal and Child Health Bureau. "*Childhood Obesity: It's Everyone's Business*," recommends that employers build on the infrastructure and resources that many large employers already have in place.

The toolkit is divided into seven major components including an overview of childhood obesity and the major ways it impacts businesses. Four components illustrate how initiatives employers already have in place may be expanded or leveraged to promote healthy child weight. These core components include:

- Benefit Design: Aligning Stakeholders to Change Behavior
- Employee Education: Equipping Employees for the Battle
- Employer-Sponsored Programs and Onsite Facilities: Using What You Have
- Community and Philanthropy: Reconsidering Company Contributions

Already, some employers have taken action to combat childhood diabetes. For example, Texas Instruments gives kids access to their fitness facilities and provides camps that emphasize wellness during vacation breaks and the summer months. Some employers also provide children medical check-ups through on-site company clinics.

Other companies have day initiatives throughout the year, like nutrition and physical fitness education during a “Bring your Child to Work” day or they partner with local community groups.

“As obesity increases among children, employers are clearly going to be affected in many ways...Schools, child care facilities, communities and families have begun to respond but more focused efforts are urgently needed. Employers and health care providers also have roles to play as part of a comprehensive solution. Clearly, childhood obesity is everyone’s business,” concludes LuAnn Heinen, a vice president and director of the Institute on the Costs and Health Effects of Obesity.

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