

Chubby Babies

*The University of Pittsburgh
Office of Child Development*

At 10-months, Stacey still hasn't developed the cherubic plumpness that would put her grandmother's mind at ease. She doesn't look healthy, Grandma worries. She needs "some meat on her bones."

Stacey's 10-month-old cousin is plenty plump. Cousin Elizabeth's roundness pleases Grandma, but worries her mother. Mom is afraid her baby will turn out to be a chubby child and an obese adult. She's begun feeding Elizabeth smaller portions and has a strict "no seconds" rule at mealtime.

For many, plumpness is desirable in a baby. Chubby babies are cute, their roundness is seen as an indication of health. Chubby babies have been cherished through the ages. Have you ever seen a cherub who wasn't chubby?

On the other hand, some parents worry that chubbiness forewarns of obesity.

Concerns about later obesity appear unwarranted. If there is a tendency for chubby babies to become obese adults, it is only a very slight one.

The number of fat cells in the body tends to increase most rapidly during the first two years of life. Heavy adults may have more fat cells than adults who are thin. But weight gains and losses are associated with increases or decreases in the size of fat cells. When adults overeat, fat cells become larger. When they diet, fat cells tend to decrease in size.

Among infants, birth weight is essentially unrelated to what their adult weight will be. Big babies at birth are no more likely to become obese adults. And babies who are heavy at 6, 12, or 18 months are only slightly more likely to be heavy later in childhood.

But that should not be seen as a license to overfeed. Fat babies tend to have more respiratory infections. And there is no need for a baby to fall into the habit of overeating or eating the wrong kinds of foods.

At the other extreme, it's also unnecessary and not advisable to put your baby on a diet or even a low-fat diet. Some fats are essential for healthy growth.

Moderation is the best approach. Don't overfeed or underfeed. Serve only nutritious foods, and talk to your doctor about what foods to offer. Let your baby tell you how much he or she needs to eat – if all the food is nutritious, there is no need to worry.

Remember, your baby is an angel, and angels come in all sizes.

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