



Puppy fat a deadly myth

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Health Reporter

PUPPY fat is a myth — overweight children stay overweight unless they eat properly and are active.

Doctors yesterday urged parents to change their views of baby fat as new research showed children being at greater risk of heart disease.

A joint Australian-US study found obese children as young as 10 had the hardened arteries of 45-year-olds.

A diet of chips and highly processed food is ageing children, who have the vascular age of their parents.

Sydney's Royal Prince Alfred Hospital has played a lead role in three international studies revealing the damage junk food is doing.

Using ultrasound, doctors measured the thickness of the wall of a neck artery in 70 children aged 10 to 16. Almost all had abnormal cholesterol and many were obese.

Further tests at RPA hospital on 991 seemingly healthy children discovered a clear link between rising weight and the size of the heart's left atrium, a factor in heart problems.

The Children's Hospital, Westmead, paediatric dietician Susie Burrell said more young kids were showing signs of old-age health problems: "Our clinic is chock-a-block and we are seeing more families who are having extremely high levels of cholesterol and kids who are overweight and have cholesterol.

"Parents need to cut out high-processed foods like biscuits, cakes, cheese-saturated chips and cereals."

It's not known how thick a child's artery should be as they are not regularly checked for signs of heart disease but doctors know they should not resemble a middle-aged man.

The Children's Hospital in Kansas City, which led one of the studies, used tables for 45-year-olds, who often get heart checks, and found the kids' "vascular age" was about 30 years older than their actual age.

The findings were presented at the American Heart Association conference yesterday.

Australian National University researchers also found impairment in the heart's ability to relax between beats in children who were overweight or obese.

Newcastle University associate professor in nutrition and dietetics Clare Collins said parents had "one shot" at helping their kids. "They should bring in the wheelie bin and throw out all the bad food from the pantry. There is still a chance to clear out their arteries while they are still young," she said.

New York University heart disease prevention specialist Dr Michael Schloss said evidence showed obesity was more than a cosmetic issue.

"If you've seen what's on the menu for most school lunches, these findings are no surprise," he said.

"The time has come to seriously deal with the issue of childhood obesity and physical inactivity on a governmental and parental level."