

YOUR CHILD'S WEIGHT

Help Your Child with Successful Weight Management

A child with weight problems faces serious medical, emotional, and social consequences. Extra pounds can lead to high blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease, and orthopedic and mobility problems, not to mention low self-esteem and social problems.

All kids and families handle this difficult situation differently; some make it the focus of family life; others pretend it doesn't exist. But there are two basic truths about all families: 1) parents are constantly influencing their child's relationship with food, activity, and themselves, and 2) weight control is a family problem that requires a family solution. You can help your child with the challenge of weight control by being a positive role model with your attitudes, your eating habits, and your physical activity behaviors.

Causes of Overweight

Simply speaking, overweight occurs when more calories are coming in than are being spent. But it's really not that easy. Although physical activity and food choices are the most critical factors in weight gain and loss, other factors, including genetics and family and social influences, play a role.

Your doctor can help evaluate your child's weight using tools such as body mass index (BMI) and growth charts, and considering age, sex, maturity level, ethnicity, and physical activity. Remember, no one has a specific ideal weight; we all have a range of acceptable weight.

Help your child with the challenge of weight control by being a positive role model



Components of Weight Management

Weight management programs for all but the most severely overweight children and adolescents *should not* focus on weight loss. Instead, the goal is to keep weight stable while the child gets taller and more muscular over time. As with adult programs, the cornerstones are physical activity and a healthy diet. However, a child has a much better chance for success when her family also adopts healthy behaviors.

Target the Whole Family

With family participation, the overweight child is not singled out, and can learn and practice new behaviors with positive examples from the most important people in his life. In addition to teaching kids about healthy choices, you must also be a role model, support system, and participant. When all family members join in positive activities, you'll not only help your overweight child, you'll also become a healthier and closer family.

Be Physically Active

Moving your body is a critical element in weight management. Movement and exertion help everyone feel healthier, manage weight, control stress, and increase strength, coordination, and self-esteem. Researchers jokingly

point out that the most important physical activity a child can do is turning off the television set or walking away from computer games. Hours of tag, stick ball, and hopscotch have been replaced by sedentary activities such as television watching and computer games. Experts recommend that most children get at least 60 minutes of moderate physical activity daily. And if you're looking to spend "quality" time

Melanie Forshaw

BAYLOR
COLLEGE
OF MEDICINE
Office of Health
Promotion
One Baylor Plaza,
Rm 176B
Houston, TX
77030



YOUR CHILD'S WEIGHT



Plan vacations around movement and play

with kids when you're not distracted or rushed, physical activity is a great opportunity.

Support an Active Lifestyle

All family members should help select family activities as well as their own pursuits. Here are some ways you can be supportive:

- Buy birthday and holiday presents that promote movement, such as roller skates, frisbees, a croquet set, or a softball and glove.
- Involve your extended family and friends in your activities.
- Emphasize fun, not skill.
- Volunteer for physical activity events at your child's school.
- Find activities in your community, such as hiking trails, swimming pools, skating rinks, etc.
- Plan parties and vacations around movement and play. Instead of a birthday outing at the movies, how about miniature golf, or roller skating? Or a vacation that includes swimming, camping, canoeing, hiking, etc.?

Everyday Ideas

Your family doesn't have to launch into a vigorous exercise regime to expend more energy. Try making changes in your everyday routine: walk instead of drive, park further from the store, or take the stairs instead of the elevator. Everyone can help do yard work, washing the car, and housecleaning. Try to schedule active times into your

daily and weekly schedule. For example, each day after school and work, the family can go for a walk, ride bikes, or play Frisbee. On rainy days maybe everyone can exercise along with Mom's fitness video, or just put on fast music and dance.

Many active families pick a special activity for weekends: flying kites, playing tennis, swimming, ice skating, etc. Help your kids find activities that appeal to them, and pursue them through lessons, clubs, teams, and/or camps. Remember that some kids enjoy team sports and events while others prefer to participate in solitary or family-only activities.

Eat for Health

Experts agree that kids shouldn't be placed on highly restricted diets. Instead of going on (and off) diets, most people who control their weight view food as a tool they use to feel good and healthy. They have modified what they eat, how much they eat, and how they feel and behave regarding food.

Guidelines for Lifetime Weight Management

While no foods are "off limits," a sensible, healthy eating plan highlights foods that have moderate amounts of fat, sugar, and sodium. Use the Food Pyramid (see box) as a guide for food choices, and include a variety of foods, especially whole grains, fresh vegetables and fruits. Be careful to

limit portion sizes of foods high in calories, such as cookies, cakes, and other sweets, and fats, oils, and spreads. Here are some tips to work toward these goals:

- Use less fat to cook and at meals
- Choose lean cuts of meat
- Prepare foods (and order out) in ways that don't add fat—bake, roast, poach, grill
- Avoid fried foods, heavy cream or butter sauces
- Use low or non-fat dairy products and cheeses (except for kids younger than two years)
- Combine "new" foods with "favorite" foods: mix bran cereal with the 'fun' cereal your kids are used to; serve low-fat ice cream with fruit on top
- Drink water instead of soda or fruit drinks
- Remember breakfast, but forget traditional ideas. How about a slice of veggie pizza, a fruit smoothie with low-fat milk, or low-fat peanut butter on whole wheat toast?
- Take a multi-vitamin daily

Healthy Habits

- Don't draw attention to healthy foods you've purchased.
- Eat meals together so you can be a role model. Make meals a pleasant time to discuss your day, not a time for lecturing or punishing.
- Don't eat in front of the television.
- Stock your kitchen with healthy lunch and snack foods (raisins, popcorn, fruit, etc.), and store the cookies out of sight.
- Rethink the way you eat and shop. Have vegetables, beans, or pasta as the focus of your meal, with meat as a side dish.
- Serve healthy snacks and have smaller meals.
- Involve the kids in planning, shopping, and preparing meals, snacks, and school lunches using the

YOUR CHILD'S WEIGHT

Food Pyramid (see "Food Groups") as a guide. Research shows that kids usually eat the dishes they fix, and that parents do too!

- Don't use food as punishment or reward.
- Help your child consider healthy choices in places he eats, such as the school cafeteria or fast food restaurants.
- Choose smaller sizes, share side orders, set aside half of a restaurant dinner for lunch the next day.
- Don't overly restrict sweets or treats—try "everyday" and "sometimes" foods.

Strategies for Success

Studies have shown that children who make small, progressive modifications in behavior are able to build on their achievements and make permanent changes. These behaviors focus on a healthy diet and increased physical activity, and are supported by a combination of emotional and behavioral features.



Involve your kids in planning, shopping and preparing meals

Acknowledging the Problem

Most kids with a weight problem are very aware of it, but may not know what to do or where to turn. Try acknowledging your child's concerns, providing hope for the future, and promising that you will be there to help.

Self-Awareness

People with weight problems often eat for reasons that have nothing to do with appetite, such as boredom, frustration, sleepiness, anger, etc. Help your kids recognize why they eat, and suggest alternatives to automatically reaching for a snack. And note that it takes about 20 minutes after you start eating before you realize that you're getting full; remind your child to eat slowly to avoid getting "over-full."

Goal-Setting

Set family goals such as "eat healthy" or "get fit." Break each goal into smaller objectives, such as "drink 8 glasses of water daily" so you'll consistently make progress toward your long-term goal. Tips to help you stay on track:

- Be positive: "I am going to walk when I get home from school", as opposed to "I'm not going to watch TV every day when I get home from school."
- Be specific: "I am going to walk on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday."
- Be realistic.
- Write goals and objectives down.
- Re-evaluate progress regularly, and reward yourself (back scratches, movies, camping trip, basketball hoop) for all small and large victories.

Self-Esteem

Just as with adults, when kids feel good about themselves, they're more likely to make healthy changes. Point out your child's unique strengths and abilities, and encourage them to find activities that help them flourish.



Encourage your children to find activities that help them flourish

What can your son do to make him feel valuable? Picking up an elderly neighbor's newspaper? Can your daughter volunteer at a recycling center? Take an art class? It may take some creativity to help your child try new things, but with family encouragement and participation, new habits are within everyone's reach.

Professional Assistance

You can learn more about healthy eating habits and how to incorporate them into your family's life by working with a registered dietitian. If your doctor says that your child's health is at risk, you may want to consider a formal weight management program. A qualified program will be staffed with a variety of professionals (dietitians, exercise physiologists, pediatricians, psychologists), perform a complete medical evaluation, focus on the whole family, and include a maintenance program. Avoid any clinic, program, or fad diet that promises a quick fix or instant cure. If your child is extremely overweight and/or has serious emotional issues regarding weight, you should consider professional medical and/or psychological assistance in addition to the approaches suggested in this brochure.