



Healthy Weight Kids

Food Choices that Prevent Obesity

by Amber Lanier Nagle

Small changes in daily eating routines translate into healthier weight for America's kids.

In 2010, President Obama and Michelle Obama launched Let's Move! as their signature initiative to tackle epidemic levels of U.S. childhood obesity. While modest progress has been made, it remains a public health crisis. A brief by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that the obesity rate remained fairly stable at nearly 17 percent between 2011 and 2014 for children 2 to 19 years old.

Caused mainly by inadequate physical activity, unhealthy diets and rare genetic factors, obesity increases the risk of significant health problems, including high blood pressure and Type 2 diabetes, plus joint and breathing issues.

"We must launch our own family anti-obesity campaigns," urges pediatrician Ricardo Riesco, co-owner of Peds Care, in Dalton, Georgia. "Along with increasing activity levels, we can encourage healthier eating habits at home and lead by example."

Portions Matter

In today's "supersize-me" climate, teaching youngsters about appropriate portion sizes is

imperative in fostering healthy eating habits.

"It's often hard for parents to find time to cook a meal at home," Riesco acknowledges. "Too often, parents will pick up fast food for dinner, which is typically higher in calories and fat, plus the portion sizes are far too large." When parents can't prepare a meal from scratch, a frozen, boxed meal can be a better alternative than fast food. "The portions are more appropriate, so there's more control of how much a child eats." Tasty frozen organic meals are now available at many grocers.

Rethinking Family Plates

"A large part of the obesity problem stems from children consuming sodas and refined, processed, junk and fried foods," says Dae-mon "Dr. Dae" Jones, a Washington, D.C., naturopathic physician and author of *Eat More Plants*. "They are low in nutrients, and high in sugars and calories that pack on the pounds."

Jones says the best way to combat obesity and form healthy eating habits is to replace processed foods with a whole foods diet plentiful in colorful fruits and vegetables, with sides of whole grains, nuts and seeds,

and beans and legumes. "These foods are high in vitamins, nutrients, fiber, proteins and healthy fats. Lean meats, chicken and fish are good choices for protein, as well."

Breakfast and Snacks

Breakfast provides fuel for the body and helps young minds concentrate and learn, so experts warn against skipping or skimping on it. "I tell parents to, 'Get out of the box,'" says Doctor of Naturopathy JoAnn Yanez, executive director of the Association of Accredited Naturopathic Medical Colleges. "Offer them a balance of fats, proteins and complex carbohydrates."

She suggests making a batch of pancakes using an extra egg or almond meal for protein, served with fresh fruit and nitrate-free sausage. "I also recommend steel cut oats," she says. "I make them in advance, and in the morning add in all sorts of good stuff such as fresh fruit, almond meal and almond milk."

"Although almost everything can be enjoyed in moderation, decreasing or eliminating high-calorie, high-fat, low-nutrient treats can also help children develop healthy eating habits for life and prevent obesity," says Registered Dietitian Wendy Palmer, manager of child wellness and a certified health education specialist at Children's Healthcare of Atlanta. "A medium-sized apple or banana, or a cup of baby carrots with hummus, is a nutrient-rich snack for kids. Avoid snacks that have no nutritional value or are coated in sugar." For more good ideas, see Tinyurl.com/HealthySnackingOptions.

No Sugary Drinks

"There's a strong correlation between sugary drinks and overweight, obese children," observes Palmer. "I recommend that parents remove all sugary sodas, sports drinks and juice boxes from their children's diets. Water and unsweetened seltzer water are great alternatives."

Palmer notes that many eating patterns are set before a child turns 3, so limiting all sugary drinks, including juices, is an important component of teaching young children healthier eating habits that will last a lifetime.

Studies suggest a strong link between

obese children and obese adults, so for parents concerned that their child's cute baby fat has turned into something more, the time to act is now.

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