

Tips* for Parents on “How to Prevent Obesity in Your Children”



Despite the fact that nutritious and healthy meals are not always provided in our nation's schools, and the availability of soda pop and junk food machines on school premises continues, the burden of responsibility to prevent obesity in our children lies in the hands of parents. Many parents feel they are powerless, however, as parents we must set rules for when food is eaten and what is eaten by our children. Parents control the grocery shopping for the home and create the family's definition of a meal.



According to the Centers for Disease Control and the National Center for Health Statistics, in 1999-2000, the prevalence of overweight was 15.5% among 12-19-year olds, 15.3% among 6-11 year olds, and 10.4 % among preschoolers age 2-5 years, compared with 10.55%, 11.3%, and 7.2%, respectively in 1988-1994. The trend appears to be worsening each year. Overweight adolescents have a 70% chance of becoming overweight or obese adults. Type 2 diabetes is being diagnosed in teens and preteens at an alarming rate. The health consequences of these staggering figures are very serious. The following are tips for parents to help fight the obesity epidemic in children:

- **Cultivate taste buds and eating habit early on.** Offer a variety of foods, including vegetables as the first course, when the child is most hungry.
- **Be a good role model.** You can't expect your children to have good eating habits if you don't have them yourself.
- **Don't cook separately for the kids---**offer the same foods to the entire family. Your child won't starve himself.
- **Let the children help in food preparation.** They'll eat more of foods they help prepare.
- **Make gradual changes.** Pick one habit you want to change per month---such as, instead of dessert, serve fruit. Instead of hot dogs, serve lean meats or beans and lentils.
- **Never let your child leave home without breakfast.** Teach them how to prepare breakfast on their own. Simplify preparation by having whole-grain cereals, fresh fruit, and low-fat milks (including chocolate, if necessary) available.

For more great tips, see opposite side



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- **Control portion sizes.** Measure serving sizes initially and think in terms of cups and half cups. Serve ice cream in small bowls, not cereal bowls.
- **Never ever “supersize” when eating out.** Think small. Order a small hamburger and small French fries. Use the kid’s meals---the portions are right for kids, however, avoid fried kid’s meals as much as possible. Order low-fat milk instead of soda or shakes.
- **Avoid the kid’s menu when eating out in sit-down restaurants.** The choices are generally not very healthy and they are limited. Teach children how to order from the menu creatively to get smaller portions and/or to split orders or share menu items.
- **Don’t even buy it!**—chips, soda, doughnuts, candy, etc. If you buy it, you eat it.
- **Fill the pantry and refrigerator with healthy foods the children like.** Place fruits and vegetables in clear sight so they can just “grab and go” as often as possible.
- **If you buy soda (we recommend that you don’t),** avoid large bottles and offer cans.
- **Limit the locations for eating** to the kitchen and dining room. Avoid bedrooms and eating food in front of the TV. This may also help reduce TV time.
- **Have your children ask for snacks**—parents have more control this way.
- **Eat as a family when possible.** This cultivates good family relations and good role modeling is more easily learned.
- **Plan on having set meal times.** This helps prevent hunger and consuming less healthy foods.
- **Shut off the TV during family meals.** Concentrate on the food and the family!
- **Place vegetables on their plates.** Try one bite for every year of age.
- **Don’t forbid treats.** Less available, yes—but not completely banned or you could foster an obsession.
- **Be alert to frequency of fast-food consumption.** Avoid as much as possible!
- **Avoid snack foods purchased in bulk at warehouse-style markets.** These are usually high in fat and sugar, and low in nutrition.
- **Limit TV/computer time.** Get outside and play!
- **Be a role model for an active lifestyle.** Kids will pick-up your good (and bad) habits.
- **Avoid nagging your child about any food.** Being a good role model and providing the appropriate foods will work better than nagging.

* Source: American Diabetes Association: *Diabetes Nutrition Questions and Answers for Health Professionals*, 2003.