

Family Tapestries Strengthening Family Bonds



Fact Sheet

Raising Healthy Children in an Overweight World

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According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), childhood obesity in the United States is reaching epidemic proportions, and the number of overweight children has more than doubled in the last two decades. Lack of physical activity, larger portion sizes, and increased intake of sugar-sweetened soft drinks are all contributing factors. Childhood obesity causes significant concern as more children are being diagnosed with adult conditions often associated with obesity, such as, sleep apnea, Type 2 diabetes, and cardiovascular diseases.

Here Are a Few Known Facts About Children and Weight

- **Food is not the only factor in weight control.** Children may be expending too little energy. Children who watch a lot of TV, play computer games, talk on the phone, or sleep excessive amounts may not be spending the calories they take in.
- **Children grow in spurts.** Children gain and lose weight at certain times throughout their young lives. They can hold onto their weight but grow in height, and suddenly that pudgy toddler is a slender child several inches taller. So when should we become concerned? Overweight children are defined as those over 95th percentile of weight for their height (Tufts University, 2001).
- **Children's appetites vary greatly from day-to-day** and so do the foods they like. This means that one day your child might love broccoli with cheese and the next day not want anything to do with that same food.
- **More high-calorie, high-fat convenience foods and high soda consumption have increased calories in many diets.** Researchers have found that obese individuals underreport calories they consume by 30%–50%.
- **Children with slender parents have only a 10% chance of being overweight.** However, if both parents are overweight, the chance of their child being overweight jumps to 80% (Whitney and Rolfes, 1999).
- **New research studies are finding direct relationships between the lack of milk consumption and obesity.** A study published in *The Journal of the American Medical Association* suggests that young adults who consume more dairy products (milk, cheese, and yogurt) may be less likely to become obese and develop insulin resistance, which could lead to diabetes. These findings are consistent with a growing body of research demonstrating the importance of dairy products in reducing the risk of obesity and other chronic diseases.
- **Nutrient-free beverages, like soda, crowd out nutrient-rich beverages, like milk,**" said Greg Miller, Ph.D., vice-president of nutrition research at the National Dairy Council. Research indicates that the decrease in milk and dairy product consumption, along with the increase in soda and snack consumption, plays an important role in this current epidemic.

What's a Parent to Do?

- **Buy foods that are fresh and healthy.** Ellyn Satter, noted child psychologist and nutritionist, believes that it is the parents' responsibility to make sure nutritious foods are brought into the home, cooked, and put on the table. However, she also believes that it is the child's responsibility for choosing which foods to eat, how much to eat, and even whether or not he/she wants to eat anything at all.
- **Model good eating habits.** It is important for parents to encourage children to eat healthy, simply by showing them our good example! Provide healthy meal options at home—pasta with vegetables; lean meats with Parmesan cheese; milk with meals; and low fat yogurts with dessert! Children are more likely to choose healthy foods if they see you doing so!
- **Home and school environments are both important.** Common sense approaches towards reducing the childhood obesity epidemic focus on both home and school environments for the prevention and treatment of childhood obesity. Some ideas may include setting aside time for healthy meals and regular physical activity.

How You Can Help

Change is on the horizon with local school districts as well as professionals bonding together in an effort to improve kids' health. Building on the success of the Los Angeles Unified School District (2nd largest in the country) which voted to ban the sale of carbonated soft drinks beginning January 1, 2004, you could help to implement change with your local community by getting involved with PTO, working to inform school personnel, and lobbying for changes in school dietary standards.

In addition to keeping involved at the local level, there are many great resources that can help to keep you informed regarding childhood health issues:

www.familyfoodzone.com

<http://www.actionforhealthykids.org>

<http://www.cnr.berkeley.edu/cwh/PDFs/flyer.pdf>

www.kidsource.com

Although it does take more time to be involved in your child's nutrition and eating habits, remember that you can have the greatest influence in making a

lifelong difference in your child's health and eating habits.

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