

HEALTHY WEIGHT



Facts for Families

Eat Well, Live Well

Have changes in our diets caused the obesity crisis? What we eat has always had a direct effect on our health. Until the 1940s and early 1950s, diseases such as rickets and pellagra were common because of vitamin deficiencies, but thanks to an abundant food supply and added nutrients in many foods, these diseases are rare today.

Now it's the abundance of food is causing health problems. Larger portions, too many calories and too much fatty food are associated with excess weight—which in turn can cause a number of dangerous health problems including heart disease, stroke, cancer, diabetes, osteoporosis and mental problems including depression and low self-esteem.

What influences children's eating habits? Parents play a big role in guiding their children's eating habits—by the examples they set, by the foods they make available in the home, and by the mealtime experiences they create for their families. Childcare providers and school meal programs also influence children's eating habits.

Advertising also has an impact. A recent study by the Kaiser Family Foundation looked at the relationship between media habits and childhood obesity. The exposure of the typical American child to 40,000 TV advertisements a year (69 percent of which advertise candy, cereal and fast food) was found to increase their consumption of fatty and sugary food products as well as decrease their consumption of fruits and vegetables.

What can I do to make sure my child is eating well? Every day there are new and often conflicting stories in the media about nutrition, diet, health, and overweight. It can be hard to figure out the best information to use when planning for your family's nutrition. There are many ways to achieve a healthy diet — the key points to understand are what foods your child should be eating to get the nutrients needed to grow, and in what quantities (see the fact sheet, *The Childhood Obesity Crisis: What Does It Mean?*).

The Food Guide Pyramid and the Food Guide Pyramid for Young Children should guide day-to-day selections of food for the whole family. For complete Food Guide Pyramid information, including special pyramids for different cultures, visit www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/etext/000023.html.



Is there an easy way to improve eating habits? If changing habits were easy, many more people would be fit and healthy. One key to making lasting improvements is to make changes in stages. Trying to change all bad eating habits at once does not usually work. Instead, start with something simple and try to stick with it for a couple of weeks. After your family has mastered one change, plan a fun activity as a reward and then try another change. For inspiration, start a food diary. Write down everything you eat for a few days, then look over the diary to help identify a needed change. Healthy eating involves many decisions made daily. So break it into small steps to make solid progress to healthier eating. Some ideas to get you started:

- » Switch one sugary drink for water each day.
- » Eat 1-2 more fruits or vegetables each day.
- » Plan a healthy snack every day for a week.
- » Switch a breakfast donut for something healthier.
- » Switch to a low-fat version of a favorite food.

Insist on Breakfast The meal most associated with being thin. No time for breakfast? Try juice to go and a piece of fruit, peanut butter on whole wheat bread, cereal in a baggie to eat in the car, a bran muffin out of the freezer, or low-fat yogurt. Then balance it out with what's eaten the rest of the day. So if there's no protein at breakfast, make a mid-morning snack or lunch fill that gap. If breakfast is hearty, make a snack of a piece of fruit or add a salad at lunch.

Plan 3 meals and 2 snacks every day For many people, not getting too hungry in the first place is a great way to avoid overeating. A healthy afternoon snack could prevent your child from eating junk food while waiting for dinner to be ready. But mind portion sizes, because a calorie filled snack may mean little interest in dinner. If you're not much of a cook, hate looking through cookbooks to figure out what to serve, or feel there is just no time, look at the ideas in the *So What's for Dinner?* family fact sheet.

The Skinny on Sugar and Fat

Facts about Sugar

Whole or unprocessed foods such as fruits and milk contain natural sugars. However, many of today's processed or prepared foods contain added sugars that often contribute additional calories and few vitamins or minerals. Many experts believe that the increased consumption of foods and drinks made with added sugars is a leading factor in the childhood obesity crisis.

Read food labels and limit the amount of foods that list these names as the first or second ingredient:

- | | | |
|------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|
| » Sugar | » Dextrose | » Glucose |
| » Brown sugar | » Fructose | » High-fructose corn syrup |
| » Corn sweetener | » Fruit juice concentrate | » Honey |
| » Corn syrup | » Invert sugar | » Lactose |
| | | » Malt syrup |
| | | » Maltose |
| | | » Molasses |
| | | » Raw sugar |
| | | » Sucrose |
| | | » Syrup |



Facts about Fat

Fat is an essential part of a healthy diet but it is important to understand which fats are good for the body and which fats are unhealthy. In general, **unsaturated fats** are healthier for the body than **saturated fats**. The following oils contain **polyunsaturated fats** and **monounsaturated fats**, which have good effects on cholesterol:

- | | | |
|-------------|--------------|----------------|
| » olive oil | » canola oil | » soybean oil |
| » corn oil | » peanut oil | » flaxseed oil |

Another heart healthy fat is **omega-3 fat** found in fish such as salmon, sardines, trout, mackerel and some other foods.

Most people understand that saturated fat is unhealthy and increases risk for heart disease, stroke, cancer and other diseases. However, a relatively new fat has emerged that could be even more harmful: **trans fat**. Recent research has focused on trans fatty acids in many processed foods and found a direct relationship between diets high in trans fat and higher levels of "bad" cholesterol, and therefore an increased risk of heart disease. As a result, trans fats will be listed on food labels beginning in January 2006. To protect yourself from trans fats found in many processed foods, read food labels and avoid shortening, partially hydrogenated vegetable oil or hydrogenated vegetable oil. At restaurants, ask which fats are used to prepare the food you plan to order.

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Healthy Snacks to Have on Hand

- ▶▶ Fruit
- ▶▶ Low-fat cottage cheese
- ▶▶ Low-fat yogurt
- ▶▶ Frozen all juice bars
- ▶▶ Applesauce
- ▶▶ Celery or apples and peanut butter
- ▶▶ Raw vegetables and low-fat dip
- ▶▶ Graham crackers
- ▶▶ Pretzels
- ▶▶ Fig bars
- ▶▶ Cereal and low-fat milk
- ▶▶ Whole wheat crackers and low-fat cheese

Learn about Portions Large portions mean too many calories. A snack for a typical adult may be a carton of yogurt but for a preschooler, 2-3 tablespoons of yogurt is about right. Be particularly careful of portion sizes in restaurants and carry-outs, which have ballooned. Take the entertaining “Portion Distortion” quiz at <http://hin.nhlbi.nih.gov/portion/>

Make eating an enjoyable activity for the whole family Family meals can be a time to monitor what children are eating and reconnect to each other. Involve children in food preparation and clean-up. As an added bonus, consider that teens who eat dinner with their families six or seven times a week are about half as likely to abuse alcohol and drugs as those who eat family meals twice a week or less.

Do different schedules make it impossible for everyone to eat together? Are you feeding children early and eating later with your spouse? Even if everyone can't be there all the time, try to have someone sit down with the children when they eat. The idea is to build healthy life-long eating habits, not stress about having the “perfect” family.

Eat plenty of fruits and vegetables

Fruits and vegetables can help maintain a healthy weight, protect heart health and reduce risk for cancer. Recommendations now call for children ages 2 to 6

to eat five fruit and vegetable servings a day. Older children and teen girls should eat seven servings; and teen boys should eat nine servings. Learn more at www.dole5aday.com

Eat sensibly when eating out Most restaurant portions are double what the typical person needs, so order smaller dishes, share entrees, or plan on taking about half of the serving home to enjoy later. At fast food restaurants, don't super-size and try to choose healthy meals. *Restaurant Confidential* summarizes nutritional reviews at www.cspinet.org/restaurant/index.html.

Beware of sweetened drinks Watch out for the hidden calories in sweetened drinks, including sodas and even juices. Sodas and sports drinks are high in calories, and too much juice—even with all its healthy vitamins—can quickly add too many calories to a child's diet. For older children, it's best to drink no more than 8 to 12 ounces of juice a day. Healthier alternatives include low-fat milk and water.

If a child is overweight, see a health care professional for an assessment It can be tempting, especially for teens, to follow the most popular diet of the day. But children are still growing and it is important they get needed nutrients from a healthy diet. If a child seems overweight, see a health professional for advice. (See the fact sheet *What If My Child Seems Overweight?*)



Eating Well at Different Ages

When it comes to eating well, one size doesn't fit all. Healthy behaviors vary by age, so use these tips to ensure that your child is establishing good age-appropriate eating habits.

Infants

- ▶▶ Studies show that children and adolescents who were breastfed as infants are less likely to be overweight in later years.
- ▶▶ Breast milk helps protect the baby against infections and allergies and helps the mother lose weight gained during pregnancy more quickly.
- ▶▶ Babies should be fed breast milk or infant formula for the first year.
- ▶▶ Consult your baby's health care provider for information on introducing solid foods.

More information about breastfeeding and breastfeeding after returning to work can be found at: www.businessgrouphealth.org/pdfs/wbgh_breastfeeding_brief.pdf.

Toddlers and Young Children

- ▶▶ Young children can be picky eaters so it may take time for them to enjoy all the foods the family likes. Start to encourage a family mealtime when children are young.
- ▶▶ Offer a variety of healthy foods every day.
- ▶▶ Offer new foods. A food may have to be offered 10-15 times before a toddler actually eats it.
- ▶▶ Limit sugary treats.
- ▶▶ Avoid choking by quartering lengthwise grapes, carrots and hot dogs before cutting into small pieces.
- ▶▶ Avoid hard candies and nuts.
- ▶▶ Don't insist on a clean plate, let children learn to stop eating when they are no longer hungry.
- ▶▶ Do not use food as a bribe or reward for good behavior.
- ▶▶ After age 2, switching to low-fat milk and other low-fat products.

Elementary School Aged Children

- ▶▶ Be aware that these are the years when for some children foods that are high in fat, saturated fat, sugar and sodium may displace healthy milk, fruits and vegetables in the diet.
- ▶▶ Continue to build healthy eating habits:
 - Offer a variety of foods.
 - Have a healthy breakfast.
 - Encourage children to drink low-fat milk and plenty of water.
 - Teach children about serving sizes.
 - Limit sugary and high fat foods. If sugar is one of the first 3 or 4 ingredients, the food should be eaten in moderation.
 - Make family mealtimes a priority.
 - Plan for 3 meals and 2 healthy snacks daily.
 - Involve children in cooking, setting the table and cleaning up.

Teens

- ▶▶ During this period of their development, many teens' intake of fruit and vegetables and calcium-rich food decline—just when they need these nutrients most. At this stage of development, young people attain 15 to 20 percent of their adult height, half their adult body weight and about 40 percent of their bone mass.
- ▶▶ Encourage healthy food choices both at home and away from home.
- ▶▶ Encourage eating fruits and vegetables. Nine servings a day are recommended for teen boys; seven for teen girls.
- ▶▶ Encourage drinking low-fat milk and water.
- ▶▶ Continue to plan family meal times, even with busy schedules.

More information for teens on healthy eating and overweight can be found at www.kidshealth.org/teen and www.niddk.nih.gov/health/nutrit/pubs/winteen/index.html



The Business Group's tool kit, *Reducing Child and Adolescent Obesity*, is made possible by support from the Maternal and Child Health Bureau of the Health Resources and Services Administration, Health and Human Services. Read all of the fact sheets in this series to learn about the many ways overweight can be prevented and treated. The series is available at www.businessgrouphealth.org/prevention/et_childobesity.cfm