



A **pediatrician** directed health, nutrition and fitness program to manage weight and to promote healthy, lean and active youth

## Parenting Your Overweight Child

With more than 60% of Americans being overweight or obese, most of us have relatives, friends, and other loved ones who are overweight, unfit, and unhealthy. Perhaps some of us even have a chubby son who loves television or a daughter who is slightly pudgy.

And herein, the question lies: **What's a parent to do to help their child?**

Here are 12 easy tips to follow as you work with your child toward a healthy lifestyle:

- 1) **Modeling healthy choices** and engaging in regular physical activity yourself is one of the better things you can do for your child. Children learn by watching you and copying behaviors, both good and bad.
- 2) **Limit Fast foods**- hamburgers, French fries, and the like-that contributes to weight gain and is bad for the heart! Healthy eating doesn't mean Children can never eat at fast food places. When you do eat out, select foods in which no more than 30 % of the calories come from fat. Some fast food restaurants post the nutritive content of their foods. Try baked potatoes, salads (with nonfat or low-fat dressing), chicken or turkey breast deli sandwiches, vegetables and rice, fruit salads, or toasted bagels (hold the cream cheese or butter).
- 3) **Do not put your overweight child on a diet.** Dietary restrictions cause more problems than they solve. For example, children often overcompensate and don't stop when they're full (binging). Your child may also resort to "last chance eating" and eat more or may begin to sneak food.
- 4) **Provide your child with healthy, nourishing options at home,** as well as some healthy snack foods. (Otherwise children will go out and get them on their own.) Encourage breakfast and plan structured meals and snacks. Keep easy-to-grab fruits and vegetables within easy reach of hungry families on the run. Many children like apples, bananas, blueberries, carrots, grapes, oranges, sliced red peppers, peaches, raisins, and strawberries. A few even enjoy broccoli florets and celery sticks. Serve more fresh fruit and 100% fruit juices in place of soft drinks. For those few times you serve soft drinks (should you decide to do so), keep the portions small. *My Pyramid for kids* gives tips on nutrition and exercise. ([teamnutrition.usda.gov/resources/mpk\\_tips.pdf](http://teamnutrition.usda.gov/resources/mpk_tips.pdf))

- 5) **Limit sedentary activities** such as television watching, computer use, and video games and substitute enjoyable family activities. Simple activities you can all enjoy such as bike riding or walking after dinner, can make a big difference.
- 6) **Restrict the use of refined Carbohydrates** such as chips, white bread, pastries, and sugary breakfast cereals. Offer healthy whole-grain breads and cereals sweetened with bananas, raisins, and applesauce instead. Half the grains you serve should be whole grains.
- 7) **Remember that many children grow out before they grow up** (i.e., put on a little body fat before they gain inches in height). Instead of putting a child on a diet, which can damage self-esteem, get your child involved in sports and other activities.
- 8) **If your child freely expresses discontent with his or her body**, and wants to learn how to eat better, arrange for a consult with a dietician who specializes in pediatric weight control.
- 9) **Check yourself.** If you're feeling uncomfortable about your child's weight, get some professional advice from your pediatrician to determine if the problem is real. Some parents do have reason for concern, while others simply have anxiety about having an "imperfect" child. Your child might not be as thin as you were as a child, but still be within the normal weight. You can monitor your child's weight on charts available through the CDC ([www.cdc.gov/growthcharts](http://www.cdc.gov/growthcharts)).
- 10) **Be sure to love your child for who they are** and be careful not to judge him or her from the outside in. Even little comments such as "that dress is pretty, but would look better if you could lose just a few pounds" gets interpreted by the child as "I'm not good enough." Self-esteem falls and can lead to anorexic thinking where the child begins to believe that "thinner is better."
- 11) **Become an advocate** for your community. Make your voice heard about the need for safe sidewalks, health clubs that welcome overweight children (and adults) to wear shorts and tee shirts rather than bathing suits.
- 12) **Remember that your job is to determine where, when, and what your child is eating** your child's job is to determine how much and whether to eat. In other words, don't force your child to eat spinach and don't keep them from second helpings. Interfering with a child's natural ability to regulate food can cause a lifetime of struggling.

*Adapted by A. Gedissman, MD, MMM, FAAP from: Nancy Clark, RD, FACSM. American and Wellsource, Inc. College of Sports Medicine Fit Society Page. Fall 2005*