

Healthy Weight Management For Kids and Teens

Caution: Before engaging in any vigorous exercise program, it is prudent to have a health professional assess the safety of your or your child's participation. Please contact us at Plymouth Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine with any questions.

An increasing number of kids are overweight, and if no intervention is made, 80% of them will stay overweight as adults. This can put them at risk for many medical problems, including diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and sleep apnea. Obesity can also adversely affect their self esteem. While most children and adolescents should not be put on a severely restricted diet, weight management by a combined approach of a sensible diet and regular exercise will help to control their weight gain. Children and adolescents normally need a certain number of calories each day (energy allowance) that their bodies use as energy for normal daily activities (walking, breathing, etc.) and growth. Rough estimates of caloric needs range from 2000 calories for an average 7-10 year old to about 3000 calories for a very active 15-18 year old. These are only estimates and some individuals need more (fast metabolism) or less (slow metabolism) of an energy allowance for daily activities. The basic fact is that you active kids need more calories and you couch potatoes need fewer. If someone consumes more food and calories than is required by their energy allowance, than those excess calories are converted to fat for storage. Conversely, if an individual consumes less food and calories than is required by their energy allowance, than their body fat is converted to energy for the needed calories. $\text{Energy Stored (Fat)} = \text{Energy In} - \text{Energy Used}$ You will lose weight by either eating fewer calories each day or by increasing the amount you exercise. Either way, body fat will be burned and converted to energy and you will lose weight. Motivation is easier for a child or adolescent to eat healthy and exercise if she is motivated to do so. But even without motivation parents can still help their kids improve their health by providing healthy meals at home and encouraging regular exercise and physical activity. You can help your kids to become more motivated by getting actively involved in the process of eating healthier and exercising regularly. It also helps to use lots of praise and simple rewards for when your child is eating well and is being physically active. Avoid putting your child down or nagging too much when he isn't motivated.

Goals -The first goal of weight management in kids should be to stop weight gain and maintain normal growth in height. This way they can 'grow into' their weight. Parents can begin doing this by having their child eat healthier (about 500 fewer calories each day) and begin a program of regular exercise and physical activity. Once your child has stopped gaining weight and is on a regular program of healthy eating and exercising, if indicated, parents can set further goals with their child's health care professional for slow weight loss (about a 10% reduction at a time). Check with us at Plymouth Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine before pushing for weight loss; usually stopping weight gain is the right answer.

Behavior Modification-It is important to modify the behaviors that led your child to become overweight and prevent weight loss. Things you can do include:

*Limit television: you should limit television viewing to about one or two hours each day (this includes playing video games or using the computer). Watching television doesn't use up many calories and it encourages eating unhealthy foods and unhealthy habits. Basic steps include making sure the TV is not in the bedroom.

*Encourage healthy eating habits: your child should eat three well-balanced meals of average size each day, plus two nutritious snacks. Discourage skipping of meals (especially breakfast).

*Provide healthy snacks: you should change snacks to include low-calorie foods, such as raw fruits or vegetables. Avoid using high calorie or high fat foods for snacks, especially chips, cookies, etc.

*Encourage your child to drink water: you should encourage your child to drink four to six glasses of water each day, especially before meals. Water has no calories and it will help you to feel full. Skim milk for the school age and older child is an excellent source of calcium and vitamin D. Limit your child's access to regular soft drinks or fruit juices as they are high in calories (150-170 calories per serving). Diet soft drinks have no calories, but should only be consumed in limited quantities as they adversely affect bone health.

*Include physical activity every day: include exercise that is fun and easy to incorporate within your child's or adolescent's life.

*Keep a nutrition and exercise journal: help your child to keep a weekly journal of food and beverage intake and also of the amount of time that is spent watching television, playing videogames and exercising. You can also record your child's weight each week (but do not weight your child every day). Bring these journals to your visit to "show off" your child's accomplishments.

Healthy Eating Habits- It is not necessary to count calories, but you and your child should become more educated about the foods you eat and how many calories they contain. You should begin to routinely check the nutrition label of the foods that your family is eating. You want to try and eat foods low in calories and also low in fat. Be careful of many low fat or 'diet foods,' as they can still be high in calories even though they are low in fat. Also, begin checking the serving size of prepared meals and snacks. A bag of chips might only have 200 calories, but you may be surprised when the serving size is only 10 chips. Eating the whole bag can easily get you over 1000 calories. Some eating habits that will help your child lose weight include:

*Healthy Meals: your child should eat three well-balanced meals of average size each day. Serve fewer fatty foods. It is best to prepare foods that are baked, broiled or steamed, rather than fried. In addition to a small serving of lean meat, provide large servings of vegetables.

*Single Servings: Avoid serving seconds of the main course or desert. You can eat more salad or other vegetables if still hungry.

*Desserts: serve fresh fruit as a dessert and avoid frequent eating of ice cream or cake or other high calorie foods.

*Grocery shopping: buy low-calorie and low fat meals, snacks and deserts and buy low fat or skim milk and diet drinks. Avoid buying high calorie deserts or snacks, such as snack chips, regular soft drinks or regular ice cream.

*Eat at the table: Avoid letting your child eat meals or snacks outside of the kitchen or dining room. And no eating while watching TV.

*Avoid Fast Food: you should limit how often you allow your children to eat fast food, as it is usually high in fat and calories.

Fitness and Exercise -An essential part of any weight management program is regular fitness. Encourage your child to participate in a physical education class in school and extracurricular sports at school or in the community. Find physical activities that your child and your family enjoys doing. Some tips to increase your child's and family's physical activities include:

*Walk or ride your bike instead of driving for short distances. Walking to school is a good thing and the backpack won't kill them (despite the protests).

*Take a walk with a friend or walk the family dog each afternoon.

*Use stairs instead of escalators or elevators, especially if you have to walk out of your way to find the stairs.

*Park your car at the end of the parking lot and walk to the entrance of the mall or grocery store.

*Encourage regular exercise for 20-30 minutes 4-5 times each week. This can include walking, jogging, swimming, bike riding, rollerblading, riding a skateboard, etc. It can also include playing a new sport, such as basketball, volleyball, tennis, soccer, etc.

*Incorporate family activities that include exercise: Central New Hampshire is a wonderful place to explore on foot, skis, kayak or bike. Locally, Langdon Park in Plymouth has cool bike jumps, but remember to wear your helmet. Walter-Newton Natural Area off of Cummings Hill Road in Plymouth or the Mount Fayal Trail at the Science Center of New Hampshire are great "beginners" trails for the whole family. A great view of Lake Winona can be found at Bald Ledge in New Hampton. This is a really easy hike from Sky Pond which you can find by following the canoe signs off of Dana Hill Road. For a slightly more challenging hike (about 1 mile), consider hiking up Rattlesnake in Sandwich on route 113 or the Welch and Dickey trail in Thornton (4.5 miles). Some great trail books can be found at local bookstores ("Nature Hikes in the White Mountains" by Buchsbaum is one we use) or on the web at

<http://www.nhcentral.com/NHCentral/recreationframed.html>. You can rent a canoe and go down the Baker or the Pemi (Ski 'N Sport, Ski Fanatics, or Pemi-Baker River Adventures are just some of the shops that can rent you stuff! Wellington Beach in Bristol is a great park for swimming and picnicking (remember, eat sensibly).

Find more options at <http://www.plymouthinteract.com/>. Getting out is healthy!!!!

*Be a Good Role Model: To help get your child motivated to exercise and eat more healthy, it is very important that you provide him with a healthy lifestyle that he can model his own life against. This includes having healthy eating habits and participating in a regular exercise program. Also limit how much time that the family watches television. Protecting Self Esteem While it is important to help your child reach a

more healthy weight, it is not as important as maintaining their self-esteem. Some tips to help support your child include never telling your child that he is fat, avoid strict diets or withholding or depriving your child of food when he is hungry and don't overly nag your child about his weight or eating habits. Also, make sure your child knows that being overweight doesn't change what kind of person he is or how much you love him. Important Reminders:

*Be patient. Being overweight didn't happen in a day, and it is going to take awhile to see a difference.

*Get the whole family involved. Healthy eating habits and regular exercise should be a regular part of your family's life. It is much easier if everyone in the house follows these guidelines, than if your child has to do it alone.

*No food is completely off limits. Just make sure that calorie dense/nutrition poor foods are the exception not the rule.

*Avoid strict diets, fasting, and crash, liquid or fad diets. They rarely work and will discourage your child from continuing. Adult diets, such as the Atkins diet, cabbage soup diets, etc. have not been proven safe or effective dieting tools for children.

Children and adolescents should have routine health maintenance visits to ensure they are healthy and that it is safe to participate in vigorous activities. For healthy kids, these checkups are recommended every 2 years during the elementary school years and yearly for teenagers.

Call us at PPAM if your child is not having success or if it is affecting his self-esteem to schedule a consultation visit. Consider a referral to a nutritionist for help with dieting, weight loss and in planning your family's diet.

Adapted from <http://www.keepkidshealthy.com/welcome/treatmentguides/weightmanagement.html>.

I generally liked their materials, but didn't like their advertisements!

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