

Tips for Healthy Nutrition and Lifestyle

Obesity is fast becoming an epidemic among children, and is an important risk factor for diabetes and heart disease in adult life. While some causes are genetic, we can do a lot to reduce the risk for chronic diseases by adopting a healthy lifestyle right now.

First, 2 KEY points to remember:

1. Disease process (such as fat buildup) and unhealthy habits (like developing “a sweet tooth”) often start at a very young age: **We must instill a healthy behavior EARLY in childhood.**
2. Lifestyle changes, such as increasing physical activity and limiting consumption of “junk food”, must be done as **FAMILY MATTERS**, not by singling out an individual (*we cannot tell one child to exercise more and eat less if the rest of the family continue to sit and watch TV and have junk food around the house!*)

Increased physical activity:

Being active helps the body and mind stay healthy, builds strength and energy, and improves sleep disorders – *and it is a great way for families to spend quality time together!*

1. Children and adults should be physically active for a minimum of 30 minutes a day. *Go for a family walk or bike ride, dance, swim, play ball!*
2. Limit TV viewing and video gaming to less than 2 hours a day for adults, 1 hour for teens, and half-an-hour for younger children. It is best for toddlers not to have TV at all – reading picture books and listening to music is better for them!
3. Sleep well! Good sleep and good body weight go hand-in-hand.

Healthy eating involves 2 things: Eating nutritious food, and controlling food portions.

- **Eat three healthy meals daily. Encourage more fruits and vegetable; reduce sugar intake, red meat and fat consumption; have fish at least once or twice a week. Read food labels for calorie, fat and salt contents!**
- Decrease intake of butter and soft cheese, processed meats. Eat lean meat (chicken without skin, turkey) and fish more often.
- Avoid soda and fruit drinks that contain added sugar (listed as fructose, glucose, or corn syrup in food labels)
- Substitute snacks like potato or corn chips with fresh fruit, vegetable (carrot or celery sticks...), light popcorn or nuts (not for toddlers), whole wheat cereals or bread, crackers, yogurt.
- Cut back on fast food (including pizza), as they are loaded with fat and calories.
- Offer water instead of juices or “sugar free” soda drinks.
- When cooking, use less oil or butter; steaming or boiling is healthier than stir-frying in oil; use canola, olive oil when possible; if baking, get fat out before serving.
- Substitute sliced bananas or apples for jelly when making sandwiches; use less fattening dressing on salads.

- **Control food portions:**
 - Use smaller plates;
 - Discourage extra servings by dishing up your food in the kitchen, rather than having it sit out on the table for “seconds”.
 - Eat slowly: enjoy the food more! Have happy conversation at mealtime.
 - Drink plenty of water before or during mealtime to increase feeling of fullness.
 - Have dessert, but have a small portion and eat it slowly to enjoy every bite!

Vitamins and supplements:

Taking vitamin pills and other food supplements is NOT a substitute for good eating habits and a balanced nutrition. In some situations, excess vitamin intake may be harmful. Calcium and Vitamin D supplements are recommended in some individuals and populations (see separate guidelines)

A few words about **Food Safety:**

- Always wash all vegetables and fruit well before eating.
- Cook all meat, eggs and fish well. Raw and un-pasteurized animal products, including milk and cheese, may be contaminated with germs that can cause serious infections.
- Fish is very healthy, but pregnant women and young children should limit consumption of fish that may have high mercury content (such as tuna).
- **Beware of potential toxic plastics.** These are labeled with number 3, 6, and 7 in the recyclable sign. Do not microwave food in plastic containers.

In conclusion, remember that healthy life habits start early in life! Start your children on the right track! And involve the whole family in the process!

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