

LIFE TIME

Ohio State University Extension Helping You Balance Work and Family

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Healthy children in an overweight world

• Shari L. Gallup, Family and Consumer Sciences Agent for Ohio State University Extension in Knox and Licking counties

According to the Centers for Disease Control, the number of overweight children has more than doubled in the last two decades. Childhood obesity causes significant health concerns as more children are being diagnosed with adult conditions such as sleep apnea, Type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular diseases. Lack of physical activity, large portion sizes, and increased intake of sugar-sweetened soft drinks are all contributing factors.

Here are a few known facts about children and weight:

- **Food is not the only factor in weight control.** Children who watch a lot of TV, play on the computer, talk on the phone or sleep excessive amounts may not be spending the calories they take in.
- **Children's appetites vary greatly from day to day.** 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 it.
- **Children with slender parents have only a 10 percent chance of being overweight.** However, if both parents are overweight, the chance of their child being overweight jumps to 80 percent.
- **Studies are finding direct relationships between the lack of milk consumption and obesity.** A study published in *The Journal of American Medical Association* suggests that young adults who consume more dairy products (milk, cheese and yogurt) may be less likely to become obese.

What's a parent to do?

- **Buy fresh and healthy foods.** Noted child psychologist Ellyn Satter says children should be responsible for choosing which foods they eat, how much they, and even whether they eat, but parents must make sure a variety of nutritious foods are bought, cooked and put on the table.
- **Model good eating habits.** It is important for parents to show a good example. Provide healthy meal options at home: lean meats; pasta with vegetables; milk with meals; and low-fat yogurts with dessert. Children are more likely to choose healthful 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. These include setting aside time for healthy meals and regular physical activity.

Although it does take more time to be involved in your child's nutrition and eating habits, remember that you can help to make a life-long difference in your child's health.

For more information, see: *Obesity: A Childhood Epidemic*, by Cathy Nonas, available at <http://kidsource.healthology.com> (April 2001); *Child of Mine, Feeding with Love and Good Sense*, by Ellyn Satter (1991, Bull Publishing); *New Study Links Over-Consumption of Soft and Fruit Drinks to Childhood Obesity*, National Dairy Council (December 2002), available at <http://www.nationaldairycouncil.org/lv104/newsres>; and *Understanding Nutrition* by Eleanor Noss Whitney and Sharon Rady Rolfes (1999, Wadsworth Publishing).

From the Experts

Preschool children usually have a smaller appetite than they did as infants, because growth rates taper off quickly beginning about age 2. The reduced appetite, accompanied by taste buds that are more sensitive than those of adults, often results in picky eaters. That means choosing nutrient-dense foods becomes very important. The preschool years are a good time to emphasize whole grains, fruits and vegetables. If your child rejects a new food, try it again later. As a food becomes more familiar, it may become more acceptable. For snacks, allow children to choose from several selections of nutritious choices – responsibility for food choice ideally should start early.

– From "Nutrition from Infancy through Adolescence" in *Perspectives in Nutrition, Fourth Edition*, by Gordon M. Wardlaw (1999, McGraw Hill).

Lifeworks
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Parents as role models

• By Ruth Anne Foote, Family and Consumer Sciences Agent for OSU Extension in Mercer County

Children are natural mimics. They like to do what someone else is doing and model behaviors they see in others.

From birth, infants learn behaviors that parents exhibit. It's a "monkey see...monkey do" process of learning. Parents intentionally teach children to crawl, walk, say new sounds and words, how to dress themselves, and on and on. However, often parents are unaware that children are actually learning from others' behaviors, television programs, etc., as well. Children constantly watch and learn without parents realizing it.

Social skills, table manners and healthy lifestyles are taught by example. A parent who says "I never drink milk" or "Don't serve me broccoli" is teaching a child to not drink milk or eat broccoli. Since parents are the primary teachers and role models in their children's lives, setting an example is important to the learning process. Setting the pattern for good eating habits is the parent's responsibility: deciding which foods to buy, choosing foods for family menus, selecting snack foods to keep on hand. Verbalizing our likes or dislikes about foods teaches children which foods they should like or dislike.

Think about your own eating habits. Do you choose and prepare the foods your parents ate? How willing are you to try a new food? How often do you express your likes and dislikes when your children are within hearing? What foods do you offer your children? Do they include a limited variety based on your preferences?

In one 2002 study of nearly 200 5-year-old girls, researchers examined feeding practices and dietary intake. The results indicated children are more likely to eat more fruits and vegetables when their parents also ate these foods.

In this study, by J.O. Fisher and published in the *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, parents who didn't eat the recommended number of servings each day of fruits and vegetables (five a day), but pressured their daughters to eat them couldn't convince their children to eat more. The girls who were pressured to eat more fruits and vegetables actually consumed less than the girls who modeled their parents' eating habits. Pressuring children to eat healthfully does not seem to be the answer to developing good eating habits. A "do as I say" parenting style is not as effective as a "do as I do" style.

If children see their parents try new foods and eat them, they are more likely to try them also. Children who have the opportunity to taste and become familiar with a variety of foods are more likely to have a greater variety in their diet and more likely to make responsible choices.

Parents can teach, but the most powerful teaching comes in modeling the behavior you want your children to copy. If you want your child to eat broccoli, eat broccoli!

For more information, see *How to Get Your Child to Eat...But Not Too Much*, by Ellyn Satter (1987, Bull Publishing).

Fast food choices

• By Pat Brinkman, Family and Consumer Sciences Agent for Ohio State University Extension in Fayette County

Fast food is sometimes the only way to get a meal. Make the right choices so it's part of a healthful diet.

Some of the best choices include small sandwiches of lean meat cooked by broiling, roasting or baking, served on whole wheat or multi-grain buns or bread. Foods with dried beans, such as burritos or chili, can be an excellent choice.

Choose green salads, but limit toppings to those that are low-fat and only use half (or less) of the salad dressing. Other good choices include raw vegetables, baked potatoes, steamed or stir-fry plain vegetables.

Avoid deep-fried foods. Ask for low-fat cheese or choose items without cheese. Leave off sauces, mayonnaise, butter and sour cream.

For beverages, order low-fat milk, 100 percent fruit juice or water.

Skip "supersizing" and other larger entrees – they're often two to three times the size of a normal meal.

Fruits are limited at fast food restaurants, so be sure to keep ready-to-eat fruit in the refrigerator for everyone to grab and eat. Raw vegetables are another great "fast" food to keep handy at home.

For more information, see *The Tufts University Guide to Total Nutrition* (1996, Harper Perennial), and the Tufts University Health and Nutrition Letter, June and October 2002.

Form healthful habits as a family to raise healthy children

• By Linnette M. Goard, Family and Consumer Sciences Agent in Lorain County and Melinda J. Hill, Family and Consumer Sciences Agent in Wayne County

If parents give children more opportunities to eat good foods and keep them moving, these habits can follow them into a healthy adulthood. But where do we start?

Simple changes of routine can make a difference. Some ideas are listed below; sit down with your children and choose one or two items to focus on, and write them down as your plan of action. Post the ideas on the refrigerator where everyone can be reminded:

- We will eat as a family at the dinner table at least three times per week.

- We will start each day with a healthful breakfast.

- We will become involved in a sport, where we can all participate for family fun (biking, walking, skating, etc.)

- We will set aside time once a week to work together on large home projects such as gardening or cleaning the garage or basement.

- When choosing between-meal snacks, we will make nutritious choices.

- We will have at least one hour of activity (outdoors or indoors) every day.

You get the idea. Everyone is busy, but developing good habits is very important for our future and for our children. Find something that works for your family and implement your plan at least three times a week.

For more information, see *The Healthy Young Child* by Sari F. Edelstein (1995, West Wadsworth Publishing); *Practical Parenting* by Kathy Sammis (1992, J. Weston Walch Publishing); *How to Get Your Child to Eat...But Not Too Much* by Ellyn Satter (1987, Bull Publishing).