

Childhood Obesity – A Serious Problem

Today about 25 million young people (ages 2-19) in the United States are overweight or at risk of being overweight. That's nearly one of every three youths. Overweight kids are more likely to become overweight adults.

Reasons for the Crisis

At many schools, students have access to soda, candy and fast food for lunch. They also have fewer opportunities to exercise and play. At home kids are spending more inactive time in front of a TV, play station or computer. When kids eat out they are surrounded by foods and drinks that taste good, but are often unhealthy. Portion sizes are also continuing to increase. Fast food is no longer a treat but a regular meal for many kids. The result is an increase in serious health problems earlier in life. High cholesterol, high blood pressure, stroke, type 2 diabetes and depression are now a part of more and more kids' lives.

Resources for Change

There is no one solution to solving the obesity crisis. Changes need to be made at home, at school, in the doctor's office and in the community. That's why the American Heart Association and the Clinton Foundation formed the Alliance for a Healthier Generation. For more information about what you can do, visit www.healthiergeneration.org.



Empower Your Children

Helping your kids get and stay healthy isn't always easy. It's hard for them to resist the unhealthy snacks, sodas and fast food that seem to be all around them. It's also tough to get them away from the television and computer screens and find safe places for them to play and exercise.

The good news is that small changes often make a huge difference. Focus on a few areas for improvement and you'll run into less resistance from your children, but still have a positive impact on their health.

You can also help by setting a good example. Have your child set a goal that both of you can aim for together. For example, if he or she wants to try to eat more vegetables, make sure you're eating those veggies too.



A few helpful tips for even the pickiest eaters:

- ★ Get them involved in the kitchen.

Let them help you with small, kid-safe jobs in the kitchen such as mixing ingredients.



- ★ Take them grocery shopping with you.

It may take a little more time in the supermarket but it is likely to lead to fewer tantrums at meals.

- ★ Add healthy food when you can.

You can put blueberries in pancakes, chopped fruit on cereal, or small pieces of broccoli in macaroni and cheese.

- ★ Keep healthy snacks on hand.

Bring healthy snacks when you pick them up from school, after sports practice and at other times when you know their stomachs will be grumbling.

- ★ Make healthy food and meals fun.

Try cutting up food into fun shapes or making faces out of fruit and vegetables.

How to Limit Tube Time and Get Your Kids Moving

You know your child needs to watch less TV but you're dreading the screaming, yelling and crying that may follow. Here are some ideas about how to limit your kids' sedentary time.

★ Have a plan.

Be prepared to offer alternative activities to TV or video games. Try family game night, shooting some hoops, walking the dog or exploring a nearby park.

★ Be active with your kids.

Experts say that what kids of all ages want more than anything else is time with their parents. To give them that, don't just send them out to play — go play with them!

★ Don't position your furniture so the TV is the main focus of the room.

Also remove televisions from bedrooms.

★ Plan TV watching in advance.

Go through the TV guide and pick the shows you want to watch. Turn the TV on for those shows and turn it off afterwards. Don't just watch whatever comes on next.



★ Avoid using the TV as a reward or punishment.

★ Practice what you preach.

Your kids won't accept being restricted to two hours of TV watching if you veg out for four hours. The best way to influence your kids' behavior is through example.

How to Get Non-Athletes to be Physically Active

Team sports are a great way for kids to get their daily activity requirement, but competitive sports aren't for everyone. Here are some ways to encourage your "non-athlete" to get up and get moving.

★ Some kids are embarrassed to participate in sports because they don't think they're good enough. If this is the problem, find time to practice together. This may help build confidence.



★ Some kids just don't like competing in sports. That's OK; there are lots of other ways to be active. Examples are swimming, horseback riding, dancing, cycling, skateboarding, yoga, walking, etc.

★ Don't make exercise a punishment. Forcing your child to go out and play may increase resentment and resistance. Try using physical activity to counter something your child doesn't want to do. For instance, make it the routine that your child can ride a bike for 30 minutes before starting homework after school. Your child will beg for 20 more minutes outside just to put off the homework.