

The Wellness Express™



Jump on the train to good health

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How to Get Your Kids to Eat Healthier Food

Presented by: Dr. Mark Glesener

Parents' influence on the diet of their children is enormous. While that may not be surprising news, recent food research shows startling information on this topic, including faulty parental views of childhood obesity, how children perceive food within a family setting, and how children's involvement with food preparation impacts their dietary choices.

Eating in a Time-Starved World

When they are abundantly exposed to fruits and vegetables, kids are more likely to add these healthy items to their list of favorite foods. However, the same is true if they are often exposed to high fat, high sugar and high caloric items – like fast food. When parents eat poorly, kids mimic their parents' food preferences.¹

Even when they have the best of dietary intentions for their children, parents are squeezed by lack of time to prepare nutritious meals and may opt for a quick "drive thru" solution to replace a sit-down, home cooked dinner. Every year, more of North American's daily calories come from food prepared outside the family home.

The *Journal of the American Dietetic Association* recently published studies confirming that location and food sources (including fast food and store-prepared food) are significant contributors to the daily calorie intake of children.² Families eating fast food three or more times a week were more likely to have unhealthy foods at home, such as pop and chips. As well, frequent visits to fast food restaurants were also associated with higher body mass index (BMI).³ Currently people in North America spend 50 percent of their food budget in restaurants, and these foods are often high in fat and sodium.²

Dietary researchers point out that the primary sources of energy for kids between 2 and 18 years of age are grain desserts, pizza and soda. Almost 40 percent of total calories consumed were from empty calories (foods high in energy but low in nutrition).⁴

Another problem for parents is controlling the food their child eats at school. Although many education institutions are creating healthier food choices in their cafeterias, research carried out by Temple University routinely found that many items in school vending machines were over 200 calories.⁵ This revelation provides more incentive for parents to pack healthier alternatives for their kids' snacks.

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Exercise of the Week Push Ups on Exercise Ball

Difficulty: Moderate to Advanced

(Consult your chiropractor before engaging in this or any other exercise.)

Start: Assume push-up position with hands on ball, fingers pointing toward floor. Hands should be positioned directly under shoulders and body should be in a straight line from ankles to ears.

Exercise: Keeping torso perfectly straight, slowly lower yourself to ball. Pause just before chest touches ball. If your upper body strength allows, push yourself back up to start position. If upper body strength is lacking, let chest come all way down to ball, then come off ball to return to start position. Repeat 5-15 times.



Child Weight Problem Underestimated

With the number of obese children nearly topping 20 percent, you may be surprised at how some parents view obesity. Dietary experts are puzzled by the amount of research indicating many parents do not perceive their obese children as being overweight.

Parents who are also obese were more likely to underestimate that their child had a weight problem.⁶

In a study of obese four and five year-old children, about 50 percent of the kids' mothers and 39 percent of their fathers believed their child was within a normal weight range.⁷

A study conducted in the state of New York also found parents were often unaware how dangerous obesity can be to their child's health. The results showed 76 percent of parents thought an obesity problem was as minor as getting sunburn.

Steps You Can Take

What can you do to help keep your child's weight level in an appropriate range? Obviously, you need to limit your child's intake of fast food and processed food. Here are some additional tips on healthy shopping, saving time and enticing kids to eat healthy:

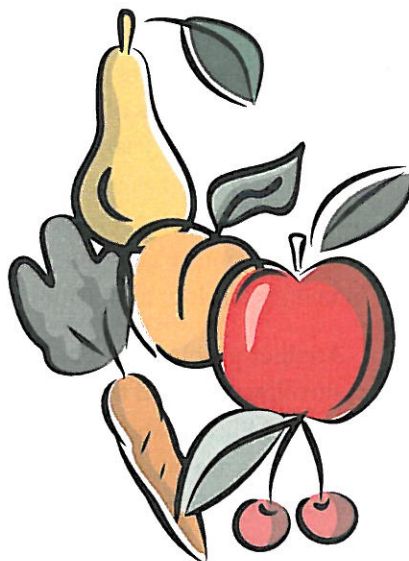
- **Plan Ahead** – Write a grocery list and stick to it. This will help reduce impulse buying of nutritionally low food. Read food labels so you know how many calories, fat and sodium are in your food items.

- **Prep Ahead** – Spend some time on a day off from work to prep meals and lunches for the upcoming week. Cut up vegetables and marinate meat ahead of time so you do not have this chore when you come home after work.

- **Eat Together** – Studies show that when parents and children sit together for a home cooked meal, both groups generally eat healthier.

- **Grow Your Vegetables** – Get your kids involved in planting and caring for a vegetable garden. An Asian study revealed that when they were involved in tending a vegetable garden, the children doubled their dietary consumption of vegetables.⁸

- **Let kids help** – Get your children involved in the meal preparation process. Having some extra help mixing and pouring saves you time and makes it more likely for your kids to eat what they helped prepare.



Quote to Inspire

"The body is like a piano, and happiness is like music. It is needful to have the instrument in good order."

- Henry Ward Beecher

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