

Visit our Website: modep-life.org

For more information
(716) 616-0116
Email: modep.buffalo@gmail.com



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Helping Your Overweight Child

The Health Education Network



The Health Education Network is a Program of the Minority Organ Donation Education Program, Inc.

Healthy eating and physical activity habits are key elements to your child's well being. Eating too much and exercising too little can lead to obesity and it's related health problems that can follow children into their adult years. You can take an active role in helping your child—and your whole family—learn healthy eating and physical activity habits that can last a lifetime.

Is my child overweight?

Because children grow at different rates at different times, it is not always easy to tell if a child is overweight. If you think that your child is overweight, first--talk to your health care provider. He or she can measure your child's height and weight and tell if your child is in a healthy range.

How can I help my overweight child?

Involve the whole family in building healthy eating and physical activity habits. It benefits everyone and does not single out the child who is overweight.

Do not put your child on a weight-loss diet unless your health care provider tells you to. If children do not eat enough, they may not grow and learn, as they should.

Be supportive!

Emotional support is also a huge factor in helping your child to improve and maintain his/her health, and well-being. Some ways of doing this are:

Tell your child that he or she is loved, is special, and is important. Children's feelings about themselves' are often based on their parents' feelings about them.

□ Accept your child at any weight. Children will be more likely to accept and feel good about themselves when their parents accept them.

□ Listen to your child's concerns about his or her weight. Overweight children probably know better than anyone else that they have a weight problem. They need support, understanding, and encouragement from their parents.

Healthy snack foods for your child to try:

- Fresh fruit
- Fruit canned in juice or light syrup
- Small amounts of dried fruits such as: raisins; apple rings; or apricots
- Fresh vegetables such as: baby carrots; cucumber; zucchini; or tomatoes
- Reduced fat cheese or a small amount of peanut butter on whole-wheat crackers
- Low-fat yogurt with fruit
- Graham crackers, animal crackers, or low-fat vanilla wafers

Like adults, kids need daily physical activity. Here are some ways to help your child move everyday:

- Set a good example. If your children see that you are physically active and have fun, they are more likely to be active and stay active throughout their lives.
- Encourage your child to join a sports team or class, such as: soccer; dance;

basketball; or gymnastics at school or at your local community or recreation center.

- Be sensitive to your child's needs. If your child feels uncomfortable participating in activities like sports, help him or her find physical activities that are fun and not embarrassing.
- Be active together as a family. Assign active chores such as making the beds, washing the car, or vacuuming. Plan active outings such as a trip to the zoo or a walk through a local park.

Because his or her body is not ready yet, do not encourage your pre-adolescent child to participate in adult-style physical activity such as long jogs, using an exercise bike or treadmill, or lifting heavy weights.

Kids need a total of about 60 minutes of physical activity a day, but this does not have to be all at one time. Short 10- or even 5-minute bouts of activity throughout the day are just as good. If your children are not used to being active, encourage them to start with what they can do and build up to 60 minutes a day.

See your doctor before starting your child on diet an exercise program.

Source: The National Institute of Health