

## Preventing Childhood Obesity

### 16 Tips for Preventing Childhood Obesity

In the past four decades, obesity rates in the United States have soared among all age groups. Today, more than 23 million children and teens in the US ages 2-19 are obese or overweight. This epidemic puts nearly one third of America's children at early risk for Type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease and even stroke. Preventing childhood obesity has never been so important.

In developing countries, nutritional deficiency is the most prevalent nutritional problem. However, over-nutrition, or obesity, is the number one nutritional disease of children, adolescents, and adults in the United States. As they get older, keeping children lean becomes more difficult. Parents have less control over what they eat at home and especially away from home. Peers and television compete with family as models for eating habits. But parents are still the most important influence on a child's behavior. For families struggling with weight, Dr. Sears recommends these simple steps for preventing childhood obesity.

1. Monitor snacks. Children like and need to graze. Grazing on five or six mini meals throughout the day is a better strategy in preventing childhood obesity than packing in three big meals a day. Since children get a large percentage of their calories from between-meal snacks, encourage them to snack on nutrient-dense, low-fat foods rather than foods which pack a lot of calories and little nutrition.
2. Avoid the "clean plate syndrome." Don't feel it is your responsibility to fill your child up, since children need to develop and exercise their own internal appetite control signals. Your job in preventing childhood obesity is to make nutritious food available and serve it creatively. The rest is up to the child. The fact is that many children don't empty their plates because parents put too much food on them in the first place. Better to dole out small dollops of food and replenish the plate when the first helping is gone.
3. Discourage boredom eating. Children often turn to the refrigerator for satisfaction, when what they are really craving is something to do and someone to do it with. It is tempting for a caregiver to offer snacks rather than devote time and energy to nurturing the whole child. Discourage your child from eating alone in front of the television set. Take steps towards preventing childhood obesity by encouraging activities that boost children's interests rather than their body fat. Keep them busy with things they enjoy doing.

4. Resist using food as a reward. Using food as a reward or as a source of pleasure outside of nutritional needs may instill unwise eating habits in children who are already at risk for becoming obese. It's okay to associate a trip to grandmother's house with chocolate chip cookies or social occasions with special meals. Food for pleasure or food for a reward deserves a PG rating – "parental guidance" is necessary. A special outing with mom, dad, or a special friend is a more effective reward than a lollipop for a job well done. These events are helpful in preventing childhood obesity because they build the child's self-esteem better than simply adding more icing on the cake. You'll also avoid sending confusing signals about food.

5. Encourage impulse control and delayed gratification. An important part of preventing childhood obesity is to help your child learn to say "no" to that second scoop of ice cream or extra piece of cake. Just say "no" to the candy racks in supermarket checkout counters. Promise a nutritious treat instead or, better still, special time with you when the shopping is done. If your child throws a tantrum about not getting three scoops of ice cream, or even two, talk her through it in terms she can understand: "Your tummy isn't big enough to hold that much ice cream and you'll feel yucky afterwards." Children don't like to wait for anything, especially food, but try this promise, "If you still want another piece of cake later, you may have one." Later the child may be so engrossed in another activity that he forgets about that promised extra piece of cake, or he'll find he just doesn't want it.

6. Trim TV watching. Today's preschool and school-age children watch an average of 25 to 35 hours of TV a week. This contributes to obesity for two reasons: lack of fat-burning exercise and a slowed metabolic rate are associated with TV watching. Other concerns that TV works against preventing childhood obesity are:

Studies indicate that for adolescents fatness correlates with the amount of time spent watching TV.

TV-watching hurts preventing childhood obesity by encouraging both inactivity and the consumption of high-calorie snack foods, a double-whammy for getting over-fat. While tuning into the tube it's easy to tune out your body's signals for appetite control. Next thing you know you've downed a whole bag of chips without realizing it, and you probably won't feel like taking a long walk to burn it off either.

Advertising definitely affects children's eating habits. The largest share of advertising during children's programming is for food products, and according to one study, 80 percent of these advertisements are for foods with low nutritional value, including highly-sugared cereals, and high fat snack foods. And the advertising pays off. Studies show that children's requests for foods are related to the frequency with which they see those foods on TV, and children exposed to food advertisements select more sugared foods than children who have not viewed any advertisements. The conclusion of these advertising

studies was that repeated exposure to advertising may foster childrens' preferences for high-calorie and nutrient-poor foods which definitely does not help in preventing childhood obesity. Unfortunately, many children believe that commercials are true, especially when they see their parents eating or drinking what's advertised. Commercials teach children that food should be a source of fun and entertainment rather than a source of balanced nutrition. Take a step toward preventing childhood obesity by teaching your child to be skeptical about advertising and not to believe something just because it's on television.

7. Model good eating habits. As you eat, so your child eats. If your child sees you overindulge, he most likely will prevent childhood obesity overindulge. Preventing childhood obesity is much easier when your child can learn to discipline his appetite by seeing you eating appropriate amounts of healthy food. Children are very quick to pick up on the ways parents use food for gratification. Studies show that children follow the example of their parents and caregivers when it comes to eating habits. Dieting mothers are more likely to have dieting daughters, and parents with compulsive eating problems are more likely to have children with the same eating patterns. Girls seem to be more influenced by parental eating habits than boys. Parents shape their children's behavior in all aspects of life, and they are particularly influential in shaping their children's eating habits.

8. Back off on power struggles. Don't make food a control issue. You're likely to lose, if not in the short run, certainly in the long run. Eating and toiletry are two functions children like to control. Eating, like sleeping, is an activity you can't force a child into. Parents have a natural tendency to coerce, beg, threaten, or bribe children to "clean your plate," "eat your veggies," or "don't expect dessert unless you finish your broccoli." To many parents, a clean plate is reassurance that they are doing their job well. The unspoken message may even be "love me, love to eat the food I put in front of you." Studies show that parental attempts to assert control over food habits often backfires in preventing childhood obesity. In fact, the more parents encourage a child to eat a particular food, the more a child may dislike that food. Constant pressure to eat veggies makes children less likely to eat their vegetables. Parents can get better results by simply eating the vegetables themselves and letting their children "catch" the good eating habit. Restricting or forbidding a particular food usually does not help in preventing childhood obesity and is likely to increase the child's desire for that food and even his consumption of it. The occasional use of food as a reward for doing non-food-related jobs may increase the child's appetite for that food. Try this one: "Finish cleaning your room and you can eat all the carrots you want." It may actually work, though some kids certainly would catch onto this kind of trick. Even subtle "parent prompts" can shape children's eating habits in unexpected ways. Those "poor starving children in Africa" may get plates cleaned at dinnertime, but these members of the Clean Plate Club may grow up to overeat and be overfat. Studies show that parents who try to exert a high degree of control over a child's eating habits tend to produce children who are unable to control their diet on their own and who eat more high-fat foods. Girls are more likely than boys to be affected by parental dietary controls. Just as in all aspects of discipline, the key is to shape your child's eating behavior, not control it.

9. Take baby steps. Suddenly switching from a junk food family to a bunch of “health nuts” is likely to hurt your efforts in preventing childhood obesity by leadingt children into temptation at the junk food family next door. Like introducing solids to babies, do it gradually.

10. Get your child moving. The National Health and Nutrition Examination Surveys (NHNES) showed some surprising changes in the American diet between 1988 and 1994. Daily calorie intake in young children and adolescents remained the same, but calorie intake increased in proportion to their level of exercise. Older adolescents and adults, however, did show an increase in daily calorie intake, that is they ate too much. Surprisingly, the percentage of calories from fat in the American diet continued a downward trend. The most disturbing finding was that children exercised less in 1994 than in 1988, and this seems to be one of the most important factors influencing the negative trend in preventing childhood obesity. Obese children more often choose sedentary pastimes and even when they participate in team sports they are less active than their lean teammates. Which came first, the inactivity or the obesity? This is a chicken or egg question. Studies suggest that these inactive children are that way from infancy. Infants with only moderate food intake, but with quiet, placid personalities are more likely to become obese. An infant with a very active temperament may not become fat even with a high calorie intake. Unfortunately, with time, a vicious cycle results. The less active the child is, the more chubby he becomes, which leads the child to become less interested in physical activity. His sports skills may have been meager to begin with, and as his abilities fall further behind those of his peers, the less he’ll want to participate. Going against these patterns is essential in preventing childhood obesity.

To help our family stay lean, we have put exercise equipment in the TV room. We have also outlawed snacking TV. Our family TV is now flanked by a treadmill and an exercise bicycle. The children have watched me exercise while watching sports and will occasionally come up and ask, “Daddy can I use your treadmill while I watch TV?” The television-exercise combination results in a good old enjoyable family fat-burn. Maybe a family running or bicycling outing would be even better, but sometimes dad needs his college football fix.

11. Send your child off to school with a good, nutritional start. Studies show that breakfast- skippers tend to overeat the rest of the day, so that the total daily calories go up rather than down. Hunger triggers the neurotransmitters that stimulate eating, so a child who skips breakfast overcompensates in the afternoon and evening. Preventing childhood obesity is as simple as getting your child up early enough in the morning to eat a good breakfast and pack a healthy lunch for him.

12. Water down the sodas. Children, especially teens, are more likely to head to the soda vending machine than the water fountain. Besides having no nutritional benefit, overdosing on soda (even diet sodas) can be an obstacle in preventing childhood obesity. Soft drinks contain five to nine teaspoons of sugar per serving, and they trigger the sugar-insulin-fat cycle. Try preventing childhood obesity by offering your child healthy alternatives to soda: bottled water, diluted fruit juice, or fruit juice, and soda water mixes.

13. Use positive motivators. You want help in preventing childhood obesity by trimming your child's fat, not her self-esteem. Rather than using phrases like "so you don't get fat" or "to help you lose weight," use more positive messages that focus on fun and what her body can do, not on body image. Offer healthful foods "to help you run faster," or "to help you play basketball better." Market carrots as "good for your eyes" and fruit as an energy food for playing after school.

14. Remove overeating cues. Foods that trigger overeating should be hidden, or maybe left in the supermarket. If a bag of fatty chips stimulates a child to plop down in front of the TV and eat them until they're gone, don't have chips in the house. Most of us weaklings eat what we see. Out of sight is the best strategy in preventing childhood obesity because it keeps it out of the stomach. Buffets, except for salad bars, are off limits for compulsive eaters.

15. Set realistic goals. If your child is overweight, an achievable goal is to stay the same weight for one year. For a growing child, this amounts to a relative fat loss. Enlist your doctor's help in monitoring your child's progress with periodic "health checks," not "weight checks."

16. Serve nutrient-dense foods. Teach children which foods contain more for less. Nutrient-dense foods pack in more nutrition per calorie than junk foods, which are dense in calories but not in nutrition. A proven approach in teaching children about nutrient-dense foods is known as the traffic light approach. It's more important to teach children what to eat differently than to get them to eat less. If you are working at preventing childhood obesity, don't put your child on a diet, just change their diet.

# 16 Tips For Preventing Childhood Obesity

Post Test – July 2018

Please keep this test and certificate in your files for Licensing.  
You do not need to send it in to our office or the State.

1. Childhood obesity puts children at risk for Type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure and \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Your job in preventing childhood obesity is to make \_\_\_\_\_ food available and serve it creatively.
3. Using food as a reward is never a good idea.  
True or False?
4. Lack of fat-burning exercise and a slowed metabolic rate are associated with \_\_\_\_\_.
5. Parents and caregivers are not particularly influential in shaping their children's eating habits.  
True or False?
6. Constant pressure to eat veggies makes children \_\_\_\_\_ likely to eat their vegetables.
7. Skipping breakfast is a good way to keep from overeating the rest of the day.  
True or False?
8. Use positive motivators that focus on fun and what their body can do and not on \_\_\_\_\_.
9. If your child is overweight an achievable goal is to stay the same weight for \_\_\_\_\_.
10. \_\_\_\_\_ foods pack in more nutrition per calorie than junk foods, which are dense in calories but not in nutrition.

June Quiz Answers. 1. Calcium 2. False 3. Saturated Fats 4. Sugar 5. False  
6. Fiber 7. False 8. Potassium 9. True 10. E, Zinc



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