



Weight Management

Part 2

Helpful Tips for Parents:

BREAKFAST

Breakfast provides children with energy for an active morning. Children who skip breakfast may struggle with concentration at school, lack energy for play, and tend to eat unhealthy snacks. It's important to think about protein, fruits, and vegetables, and to be creative with morning meals. Planning ahead by preparing breakfast the night before can help ensure a wider range of healthy foods are available.

Examples of overnight preparation include hard-boiled eggs, sliced fresh fruit, cold cereal, or baking muffins and dividing them into serving sizes. Having grab-and-go foods available is also beneficial. A sit-down breakfast consisting of the four basic food groups is considered best.

LUNCH

Many children and teens say they do not eat lunch. This is concerning because by the time they get home after school, they are likely to binge on unhealthy foods because they are so ravenously hungry. Some will not eat lunch because they do not like the school lunch, do not feel they have enough time to eat lunch or do not want to stand in the long line to get their lunch. Consider packing a lunch from home; this is typically the best and healthiest option. Children who help make their own lunches are more likely to eat them.

One idea to make lunches fun is to use cookie cutters to cut sandwiches into interesting shapes. Another idea is to decorate lunch bags with colorful stickers. For sandwiches, you can put a new twist on a favorite by topping peanut butter with raisins, bananas, or apple slices. For color and crunch, a variety of vegetables like cucumber slices, carrots, or zucchini. Avoid sending juice boxes/pouches in their lunch. This is quite unhealthy and unnecessary. Consider the smaller water bottles and a piece of fruit instead. Chips, cookies, and candy should also be limited or eliminated. A treat is ok for special occasions but eating these every day will make reaching nutrition goals very challenging to achieve.





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PROTEIN

Proteins serve a critical role in infant and pediatric growth. From 6 months to 13 years of age, 58% of dietary protein is used to support growth. From 14 to 18 years, 43% of dietary protein is used for growth. Lean, healthy options should be encouraged. Proteins are found primarily in meat, poultry, fish, legumes, lentils, nuts, seeds, soy foods, whole grains, and dairy products. Beef, pork, poultry, fish, eggs, dairy, soy, and quinoa are considered high-quality complete proteins because they provide all essential amino acids and are easily digested. If children or teens follow a vegetarian diet or do not eat much meat, consider alternatives such as eggs, tofu, beans, lentils, nut butters, greek yogurt, edamame, or plant-based protein options..

VEGETABLES

Vegetables are one of the five major food groups and are important for children's growth and health. The amount children need depends on age: about 1 cup per day for ages 2-3, 1½ cups for ages 4-8, 2-3 cups for ages 9-13, and 2 ½-3 cups for 14 and older. Raw or cooked, vegetables provide important nutrients such as vitamins, minerals, and fiber.

If a child refuses green leafy vegetables, Offer dark yellow and orange vegetables like carrots, squash, and sweet potatoes for vitamin A and beans for folate. For children who don't like cooked vegetables, raw vegetable sticks and salads can be an option.

Taste preferences can change over time, so it's important to keep trying vegetables. Introduce one new vegetable each week and encourage your child to take one bite each day to get used to the taste and texture. You can also mix vegetables into other foods, but let your child know they are there so they learn to recognize and enjoy them.





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FRUIT

Fruit is nutritious and often easier for children to enjoy. Limit fruit juice and fruit-heavy smoothies because they contain a lot of sugar. Instead, add a small amount of fruit to a vegetable-based smoothie for flavor.

FATS

Fats give the body a lot of energy and provide important fatty acids that the body cannot make on its own. They also help absorb vitamins A, D, E, and K, which help us stay healthy.

Some fats are healthy and good for your body- Foods like avocados, olive oil, walnuts, macadamia nuts, almonds, salmon, flax seeds, and chia seeds contain healthy fats. These fats help the body grow, support brain development, and help you feel full longer after eating.

Eating too many saturated fats can be unhealthy. A diet high in saturated fats such as cheese, processed meats, baked goods, and fried foods, increase the risk of heart disease later in life.

CARBOHYDRATES

Carbohydrates (carbs) are not all the same. Some carbs are healthier than others. Carbs that are high in fiber are better for your body than low-fiber (simple) carbs. For example, whole wheat bread, whole wheat pasta, and brown rice are healthier choices than white bread, white pasta, and white rice because they contain more fiber and nutrients. Foods with a lot of added sugar and refined carbohydrates can raise blood sugar quickly. Eating too many of these foods over time may increase the risk of health problems such as type 2 diabetes. Children and teenagers should get about half of their daily calories from healthy carbohydrates found mostly in grains, vegetables, and fruits. Carbohydrates are the body's main source of energy.



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SUGAR

Calories from added sugar can add up quickly and may lead to weight gain over time. Sugar can also cause tooth decay. Eating or drinking too much added sugar can increase a child's risk of health problems such as obesity, tooth decay, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, type 2 diabetes, and fatty liver disease. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children limit foods and drinks with added sugar. Sugary drinks are one of the biggest sources of added sugar in kids' diets. These include soda, sports drinks, and many fruit drinks. Even foods that seem healthy, like flavored yogurt, can contain a lot of added sugar. It is important to read food labels. Ingredients are listed from the largest amount to the smallest amount, so added sugars may appear near the top of the list. Artificial sweeteners can sometimes help reduce sugar intake, but they should still be used in moderation while research continues about their effects in children. Choosing whole foods like fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and plain yogurt is usually a healthier choice than highly processed foods.

GROCERY SHOPPING & RESTAURANTS

Remember that the healthiest foods are on the perimeter of the grocery store — produce, meat and dairy. The healthiest foods (whole foods) do not have a nutrition label. It is important to be on this journey as a family. Do not isolate the overweight child/teen to make healthier choices alone. Do not have foods in the home that are tempting and not healthy. Having a kitchen and pantry set up for success will lead to successful outcomes. Eating out should be discouraged as much as possible, particularly fast-food. Even salads from fast-food restaurants are typically loaded with calories. However, we all like to eat out sometimes and indulging in a splurge meal once in awhile is ok, and it may actually be beneficial to long-term success.





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EXERCISE

Exercise by itself does not usually cause weight loss. You cannot “out-exercise” a poor diet. However, exercise is very important for overall health and can help maintain a healthy weight. It can also make you more aware of healthy eating when done regularly.

Children and teens should get about 60 minutes of physical activity each day. This can be playtime or formal exercise, as long as it raises the heart rate and causes some sweating.

Finding ways for kids to be active can be tricky in the hot summer months, but it should not stop them from moving. Be creative! Some ideas include:

- Following online exercise programs
- Playing active video games, like Wii
- Having a dance party in the living room
- Playing tag, leapfrog, or hopscotch with younger kids
- Doing jumping jacks, push-ups, or sit-ups during TV commercial breaks for older kids

It may take some creativity and parent involvement, but it is very important. Exercise can lower the risk of high cholesterol, diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, and even cancer.

Exercise should be a family activity, not just something your child does alone. Talk about exercise goals together. If your child already exercises, increase activity slowly toward 60 minutes per day. If they do not exercise much, start slowly, maybe 10 minutes per day, and build up over time. The goal is to succeed and gradually reach 60 minutes or more each day. Being active should be a regular part of family life. Healthy habits learned in childhood are more likely to continue into adulthood.

