

Kids' Weight Management

Pediatricians around the country are providing weight-management programs for parents interested in teaching their kids healthy eating habits at an early age. Kids can choose "thumbs up" and "thumbs down" foods and learn to listen to bodily cues as well as find out about the importance of exercise.

Top 5 Tips for Limiting Sugary Treats

1. Explain what treats are: Children may not understand the difference between healthy food and treats. Explain to them that healthy foods like grains, fruit, vegetables, dairy, and meat help them grow big and strong, whereas treats do not.
2. Offer treats with milk, yogurt, or fruit: Adding a protein or fiber-rich food to treat time will help the child to fill up -- and it will also slow the digestion of the treat. The sugar in the treat will not be released as quickly, so you will avoid a sugar high followed by a sugar low (this is the sugar roller coaster).
3. Practice portion control: Children have smaller stomachs than adults do and they fill up quickly. Keep treat portions small so that children do not satiate themselves and refuse other healthy foods. Offer treats only after a reasonable amount of the preceding meal has been consumed.
4. Don't serve treats at all hours: There is no place for treats at breakfast because it gets a kid's day started on the wrong foot (the sugar high). Offer treats later in the day so that the child has had a couple of meals in them and has met most of their nutrient requirements for that day.
5. Bake treats together: Baking can be a great learning experience for children, so try to include them when possible. Take them to the store to buy the ingredients, then allow them to measure, stir, and pour in the kitchen. Encourage the child to share the finished treat with others; it'll boost their confidence and leave less around to be consumed by them and you!

Pediatricians say it's never too early to start managing a child's weight -- especially with the rise in childhood obesity.

What Moms Can Do about Kids' Weight Management

In addition to sensible eating habits, children need exercise to stay fit. Pediatrician Dr. Cara Natterson suggests inspiring kids to get moving by emphasizing health instead of looks.

Young children tend to get more exercise than their older peers. This is because most of what they do in their free time involves running around and being physical. Limit TV

time and restrict access to computers for your school-aged kids. If you do this, your kids are less likely to sit and more likely to move.

Label exercise. Point out that by running around and playing, your child is getting the exercise she needs. If you start emphasizing this concept at a young age, your child will learn that exercise doesn't need to be a chore.

Kids in the preteen age group go one of two ways. A small group become local elite athletes -- in organized sports, these kids play for the school team or the club team; in non-organized sports (like dance, for instance), they begin to practice several times per week and perform more often. The majority of preteens, however, see a significant drop in exercise. They participate in PE at school but have difficulty finding time or access to other forms of exercise.

Implement the 5-day-per-week rule. The goal for adequate exercise is 30 continuous minutes (or more!) of huffing and puffing 3-5 times per week. Make your child responsible for keeping track by using a calendar to mark off days when he gets exercise. The exercise can include just about anything: playing a sport, running around the yard, jumping rope, jumping on a trampoline, taking a yoga or dance class, taking the family dog for a brisk walk or jog, and so on.

Get in the act, too. Moms should follow the same routine, not just because it models the behavior but because it is good for you as well as your kids. Dr. Natterson says that when parents carve out an exercise "session" with their child at least once a week, it can serve as a great time to catch up and learn about what is going on in their child's life.

Encourage your child to find something he likes to do. If he understands that exercising is a life-long necessity, he may be more motivated to learn to enjoy it.

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1. [Toddler on a Diet?](#)
2. [Get Your Kid Off the Couch!](#)
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Additional Resources for Kids' Weight Management

- [American Academy of Pediatrics](#)
- [United States Department of Agriculture](#)
- [Weight Watchers](#)