

How to help your overweight child

Your child may feel self-conscious about his or her appearance. She may be teased by classmates, which can lower the youngster's self-esteem. Being overweight can also have serious physical consequences. Overweight children are far more likely to develop diabetes, heart disease, liver disease, and orthopedic and other health problems.

Your child's physician will discuss with you and your child ways to control his weight by gradually making changes in diet and physical activity. Your clinician will discuss modifying unhealthful behavior patterns, such as eating meals in front of the TV. As you implement these suggestions and set specific goals, keep in mind some general parenting guidelines.

Be a good role model

Be more active and improve your own diet. Implementing the same changes your child agrees to may help motivate him to stick with the program.

On the Internet

The Internet is a good source of additional information, including recipes. Try <http://www.smallstep.gov>, a US Department of Health and Human Services site, from which you can subscribe to a newsletter and download a comprehensive book, *A Parent's Guide To Healthy Eating and Physical Activity*. Other helpful sites include those of the American Diabetes Association (<http://www.diabetes.org>) and the American Dietetic Association (<http://www.eatright.org>).

Remove temptations from your home

Keep only healthy snacks on hand—such as fresh fruit and low-fat popcorn. Remove chips, frozen pizza, ice cream, and the like.

Offer alternatives

Let your child choose between 2 healthful alternatives—green beans or a salad or swimming or a walk. A child is less likely to view something she chose herself as unattractive.

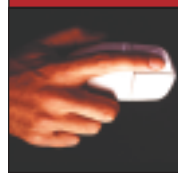
Follow a regular schedule for meals and snacks

This helps a child develop healthy eating habits and prevents constant eating (grazing), which can lead to overeating. Eat meals together at the family table to stimulate conversation and take the emphasis off food.

Reward your child for achieving goals

Give a reward for achieving a goal, such as eating only 1 dessert a week. An activity, such as going to an amusement park or a show, is a good reward. Praising your child for making a healthful choice such as drinking water instead of soda with meals is itself a powerful reward. Do not use food as a reward because it sends the wrong message. Reward the child only for a change in behavior, not for losing weight.

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Family strategies to eat right and move more

Encourage your child to be physically active

- Allow your child to spend no more than 2 hours a day watching TV, playing video games, or surfing the Internet.
- Schedule regular times for family walks or other physical exercise.
- Add physical exercise to everyday activities by, for example, parking far back in the mall lot or taking the stairs instead of the elevator.
- Assign your child household chores, such as yard work or walking the dog.
- Encourage your child to ride a bike every day for at least 20 minutes.
- Support your child's participation in organized sports.
- Use parent-child contracts to focus on particular behaviors (like taking a weekly family hike).
- Hold a nightly family meeting to review the day's eating and activity, solve any related problems, and provide praise for healthy behaviors.
- Reduce time spent in sedentary behaviors, especially watching TV (remove the TV from your child's bedroom).

Develop healthy eating habits

- Replace soda or sugared drinks with water.
- Substitute low-fat or reduced-fat dairy products for full-fat products.
- Substitute fresh fruit for cookies, cakes, and other desserts.
- Replace fried foods with those that are baked, steamed, or poached.
- Have available healthful snack options, such as fruit, vegetables that can be eaten raw, low-fat popcorn, graham crackers, low-fat frozen yogurt, fat-free fudge bars.
- Take a homemade healthful lunch to school or work instead of buying a cafeteria meal.
- Eat whole-grain foods such as brown rice and whole wheat bread instead of white rice and white bread.

- Freely eat fresh fruit, salads (with low-fat dressings), fat-free dairy products, and nonfried skinless poultry and fish.
- Eat in moderation starchy vegetables (such as potatoes, corn, and peas), rice, pasta, and bread.
- Rarely eat foods high in fat and sugar, such as cakes, pies, fast food, fruit juices, and pizza.
- Eat a wide variety of foods.

Observe healthful behaviors

- Eat meals and snacks at regularly scheduled times to avoid grazing.
- Read nutrition labels.
- When eating meals at the dinner table, put the focus on conversation, not just the food.
- Plate food instead of setting out serving dishes to discourage seconds.
- Do not keep calorie-dense snacks, such as chips, ice cream, cakes, and cookies, in the house.
- Keep a food and activity diary to see what triggers eating.
- Eat slowly.
- Eat out at a restaurant no more than once a week.
- Limit fast-food meals to once a week.
- Don't eat in front of the TV.
- Eat a healthful breakfast.

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