

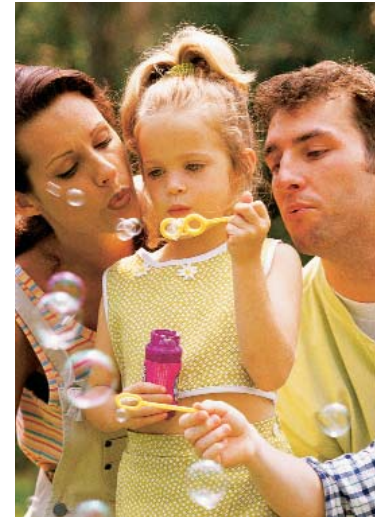


DEALING WITH FAMILY WEIGHT ISSUES

Parents want their children to be healthy yet they often don't have answers to questions like:

- How can I prevent my children from becoming overweight?
- If my child(ren) is already overweight, what should I do about it?
- How do I deal with my own weight problem, and how does that affect my family?

Parents who find themselves dealing with any of these weight issues can use this as an opportunity to get “refocused” on becoming healthier, as a whole family. Family life plays a key role in a child’s eating habits, and physical activity patterns, which in turn are directly related to weight issues. Parents are important positive role models in helping their children develop healthy habits that can last a lifetime.



Here are some practical suggestions to help parents get refocused on being a healthier family:

Food and Eating:

- Eat more meals together than you do right now. Research shows that children who eat more home-prepared meals with their family are generally healthier than those who don't.
- Set the rule that children must sit at the table during family mealtimes, even if they are not hungry. The television and phone should be turned off.
- Offer children a new food on a regular basis (e.g. once every 2-3 weeks). You may have to offer the new food a number of times, prepared in different ways before they learn to accept it.
- Offer children similar choices (e.g. regular or frozen yogurt; celery or carrots; graham crackers or soda crackers; apples or oranges, etc.). This allows them the freedom to choose what they want to eat, but from a limited number of options, all of which are healthy.
- If you always provide a substitute food (e.g. act as a short order cook in your own kitchen!), then your child will be less encouraged to eat the original, often healthier option.
- Avoid telling children to “take one more bite” or to “clean your plate”. Children need to be able to stop eating when they are full to help prevent overeating later in life.
- Have a ready supply of nutritious foods on hand for snacks and meal preparation. Limit the cupboard competition of unhealthy food items. Use Canada’s Food Guide to Healthy Eating when planning meals, choosing snacks, and grocery shopping. Create a healthy snack list with your child and post it on the fridge.
- Teach your children to cook and know their way around the kitchen. This helps them learn valuable life skills and provides “quality time” between yourself and your child.

Many parents are faced with challenging dilemmas when it comes to weight issues.

WEIGHT ISSUES

- Say “no” to super-sized portions when eating out. Instead, choose smaller versions and increase the nutritional quality of your food choices. For example, add nutritious items like low-fat milk or 100% fruit juice to drink instead of soft drinks; or a tossed green salad with a low-fat dressing. Also, check out the healthier, lower calorie menu items that many fast food restaurants are now offering health-conscious consumers.
 - Show your children how much you enjoy eating nutritious foods. Your children are more likely to eat the same foods that they see you eating and enjoying.
- Physical Activity:**
- Be an “active living” family, one that reflects a way of life in which physical activity is valued and a part of daily life.
 - Be a positive role model by staying active yourself. Include regular physical activity as part of your own routine. Take the stairs instead of the elevator. Go for a brisk walk. Try a new activity. Leave the car at home for short trips. When you do take the car, park further away from your destination and walk a bit.
 - Limit time on the TV, computer, and video games to less than two hours daily.
- Provide your children with regular opportunities to learn lifetime skills such as swimming, cycling, soccer, dance, martial arts, basketball, skating, skiing, and golfing.
 - Choose to walk, cycle, or in-line skate with your children whenever possible on safe cycling lanes and trails in your area.
 - Balance your children’s day with physical activities that are informal and unstructured, particularly for children who shy away from competition. Encourage a romp in the park, driveway hopscotch, or a walk to the store.
 - Focus your children’s attention on the game rather than the outcome. “That was a great play you made!” Compliment them on their efforts to promote their self-esteem. “You must feel proud of yourself!”
 - Plan physically active family outings with your children like bowling, roller blading, hiking, cycling, walking, swimming, or visiting a local park to play Frisbee.
 - Find out about programs available in your neighbourhood: family swim times, kiddy gymnastics, or sport programs during school breaks.

If your child is already overweight or obese, you may be tempted to put her or him on a diet. This is generally not a good idea. Instead, it is more important to allow a child who is overweight to grow into their current weight, not to lose weight. Consult your child’s doctor to determine if their weight is healthy, and to monitor their growth pattern for a period of time. If necessary, work with your doctor

on weight loss intervention programs. In the meantime, focus on the suggestions listed above. In addition, let your child know they are loved and appreciated, whatever their weight. An overweight child probably knows they have a weight problem better than anyone else. As a parent, focus on giving support, acceptance, and encouragement, and work towards becoming a healthier family.

For more information on children and dieting, see the article, “Should I Put My Child on a Diet?” in the latest Health Issues Newsletter of the Working Toward Wellness Program.