



## Preventing and Treating Childhood Obesity Requires the Entire Family

We hear a lot in the news about children and the “obesity epidemic”. How bad is the problem? The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) report that approximately 30.3% of children ages 6-11 are overweight and 15.3% are obese. For adolescents ages 12-19, 30.4% are overweight and 15.5% are obese. Being obese increases a child’s risk for some serious childhood medical problems, including pre-diabetes, diabetes, heart disease, hyperlipidemia (too much fat in the blood which can clog the arteries), bone conditions, sleep apnea (the absence of breathing during sleep), emotional problems, and poor self-esteem. In addition, the CDC reports that even young children are developing Type 2 diabetes, also known as adult-onset diabetes, which is relatively rare in people under the age of 40.

The challenges to changing the way children eat are as numerous as the factors that have prompted the obesity epidemic in the first place. It is becoming evident that the forces that make kids fat are really hard to fight and a 20 minute “nutritious lunch program” in school can’t do it all. Parental influence, poverty, and advertising are all strong elements in shaping how a child feels about food and the quality of food available.

Making changes can be challenging, especially when today’s families juggle busy schedules, and time and money constraints. But if your family works together and supports each other’s efforts, success is possible. Eventually the new changes will be an every day part of your family’s life and will just be the way things are done. So help and support each other on this journey. Your children’s lives depend on it.

*Written by Rebecca Cohen, Certified Lifestyle and Wellness Coach*

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**How can parents help their children develop healthy eating habits and lose weight? Here are some TIPS:**

- 1. Set a good example and create a home environment that supports everyone’s wellness efforts.**
  - Have your child set a goal that both of you can aim for together, such as eating more fruit;
  - Encourage the kids to play outside and organize family outings that involve physical activity;
  - Limit time spent playing video or computer games and watching TV;
  - Eating in front of the TV is associated with being overweight, so don’t permit it;
  - Make sure everyone eats breakfast.
- 2. Help your children make the right choices. You can’t control everything, but by helping children make healthy choices when and where you can, you’ll gradually see positive changes.**
- 3. Start Slow: Pick just a few small changes (1, 2 or 3) to make now and then add more later:**
  - Switch from soda pop to milk or water, or allow soda only a couple times a week;
  - Bake foods in the oven rather than frying;
  - Replace frozen, boiled vegetables with raw, marinated ones.
- 4. Keep only healthy snacks in the house. It’s hard for children to resist unhealthy food when it’s all around them.**
  - Keep cut up fruits and vegetables in the refrigerator that are readily available;
  - Don’t buy foods that have trans fats in them;
  - Learn to read food labels for the healthiest food.
- 5. Make the best choices you can for your children when you take them out to eat.**
  - Order: broth soups (not creamed based), broiled meats (not fried), a side of fruit (not French fries), low fat yogurt (not desserts with more fat).
  - Ask for a “take home box” and box half the food immediately so it can be eaten another day.
- 6. Get to know what your school offers for lunch and in vending machines:**
  - If the lunch program has limited healthy food choices, send a healthy lunch and/or snack with them;
  - Talk to your children about making healthy food choices;
  - Talk to the school about providing better selections.
- 7. Plan ahead when you go grocery shopping.**
  - Plan your meals for the week; make sure you stock up on healthy snacks;
  - Use the trip as a way to teach your children about food and nutrition;
  - Be strong when saying “no” to children who want to put junk food in the cart.
- 8. Buy in season fruits and vegetables.**
  - Buy at the local farmer’s market in the Summer and Fall;
  - Start a new Fall Tradition of freezing farmer’s market food with the kids.
- 9. Learn as much as you can about healthy nutrition and preventing obesity in children from the following web sites:**
  - [www.smallstep.gov](http://www.smallstep.gov)** – Information for parents to help children stay healthy; kids section has Web links, games, activities, a fun nutrition challenge and food facts.
  - [www.mypyramid.gov](http://www.mypyramid.gov)** – U.S. Dept. of Agriculture web site with dietary guidelines for adults and children; kids section has a nutrition poster, tips for families, coloring page, classroom materials, games, nutrition information.
  - [www.healthierus.gov](http://www.healthierus.gov)** – Offers links to healthy recipes, how to save money on food, fitting exercise into a busy schedule, teaching children about nutrition, and more.
  - [www.bam.gov](http://www.bam.gov)** – A neat web site to show kids how to get involved in different kinds of sports
  - [www.healthiergeneration.org](http://www.healthiergeneration.org)** – Guidelines for what is healthy food in a school lunch program with ideas about how to get involved and making healthy choices.