

Strategies for Encouraging Healthy Eating and Active Living in Children and Youth

Child Behaviors That Contribute to Excessive Weight Gain

Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviors

- Excessive TV viewing, videos, computer games
- Not spending enough time being physically active, e.g., outside, at PE and recess, or on the way to school

Dietary Behaviors

- Overconsumption of sweetened beverages
- Consuming excessive portion sizes
- Overconsumption of high-fat and fast foods
- Skipping breakfast
- Underconsumption of fruits, vegetables, dairy, and whole grains

Child Behaviors to Prevent Excessive Weight Gain

- Limit TV/video/computer screen time to 2 hours or less per day
 - Increase daily active play and other fun, lifestyle physical activity, ideally to 60 minutes a day
 - Drink more water and low-fat milk and less sweetened beverages such as soda and fruit drinks
 - Eat portion sizes in line with USDA's recommended Food Intake Patterns (see MyPyramid.gov)
 - Eat high-fat fast food items no more than 1 to 2 times a week and supplement with fruits, vegetables, milk, and water
 - Eat breakfast daily
 - Eat more fruits, vegetables, and dairy; eat half of grains as whole grains
-

How Professionals Can Help

PARENTS AND FAMILIES

Assist parents in helping their children increase physical activity and decrease sedentary activities:

- Make physical activity part of everyday life, e.g., active play, walking to school
- Limit TV/video/computer screen time to 2 hours or less per day
- Remove TV sets from children's bedrooms
- Make physical activity fun and involve family members
- Model physical activity

Assist parents in exploring ways to help their children improve their diets:

- Offer water or low-fat milk as main beverages
- Serve more regularly scheduled family meals and less fast food and eating out
- Encourage breakfast and more fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and dairy

- Turn off the TV while eating
- Serve foods and beverages in small initial portions and offer second helpings as needed
- Involve children in food preparation
- Model healthy food choices and portion sizes

Teach parenting skills, in particular how to:

- Set limits (on TV time and access to high-calorie, low-nutrient foods)
- Develop positive division of responsibility (offer healthy eating and active play choices, but let kids decide how much, if any, of each)
- Use encouragement and positive reinforcement; do not use food as a reward or for comforting

Help families learn food budgeting skills to improve household food security

Promote breastfeeding

Help parents address their own issues and concerns related to weight and body image

How Professionals Can Help

AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS AND CHILD CARE PROVIDERS

Work with providers to create policies and environments that enable them to model and encourage healthy eating and activity

Assist providers in exploring ways to offer increased opportunities for fun, noncompetitive active play suitable for children of diverse interest levels and abilities.

For example:

- For older kids, have them choose music to dance to and encourage “active” video games
- For younger kids, introduce musical games and lead active, noncompetitive games
- Provide easy access to active toys—balls, jump ropes, hula hoops
- Take kids outside every day
- Limit TV, video, and computer game use

Assist providers in exploring ways to offer healthful meals and snacks:

- Replace sweetened beverages with water or low-fat milk
- Offer fruits and vegetables as part of every snack
- Include whole grains
- Offer high-fat or high-energy dense foods in moderate portion sizes

Help providers address their own issues and concerns related to weight and body image

SCHOOLS

Assist school personnel (such as teachers, food service staff, and administrators) and related parent and community groups to create a school environment that supports healthy eating and active living:

- Meal time: Provide enough time to eat as well as to socialize; schedule recess before lunch
- School meals: Offer tastes, classroom experience with new healthy items, and local produce
- A la carte/vending/school stores: Increase healthy choices and replace sweetened beverages with water and low-fat milk
- School breakfast: Encourage participation and healthy choices
- Classroom food: Encourage healthy choices such as fruits, vegetables, low-fat dairy, and whole grains for snacks, parties, and special events
- Classroom teaching: Integrate skills-based education on nutrition and physical activity into curriculum
- Food as reward: Do not use food as a reward—try extra recess instead
- Physical education: Provide daily PE or increase amount offered; emphasize lifetime fitness skills
- Recess: Increase amount, encourage active play, and have active indoor recess in snow or rain
- Fundraising: Sell mostly nonfood or healthy items and create guidelines
- School/PTA events: Include healthy choices such as fruits, vegetables, low-fat dairy, and whole grains
- Role modeling: Encourage staff to model and encourage healthy behaviors, e.g., eat with students or wear pedometers; help staff address their own issues and concerns related to weight and body image
- Walking to school: Promote safe routes to school, “Walk Our Children to School” events, and other community efforts to encourage kids to walk or bike to school