

+ Helping Your Child Achieve A Healthy Weight

A Family Approach

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School aged children look to you as a role model for all sorts of behaviors; modeling a healthier diet for the whole family can make these changes smoother for your child. **Remember:** healthier eating is not just for weight loss it's beneficial for everyone!

There are so many changes that can be made and fitting them into a busy lifestyle can be challenging for everyone. Here are some changes to start with on your journey to a healthier lifestyle for your child and your family.

Schedule, Schedule, Schedule

If your child is a “grazer”, meaning that they like to nibble throughout the day, create an eating schedule. This accomplishes two things: firstly it cuts back on calories that are mindlessly consumed and secondly it helps the child tune into their hungry cues. For example: breakfast, midmorning snack, lunch, midafternoon snack, and dinner. Keep timing as consistent as possible throughout the weekdays and weekend days.

Scheduling is also important for you as well! Planning meals ahead is a great way to avoid calling for pizza or throwing together something that may not be the healthiest. Create a meal plan for few days or a week and try new recipes than can be carried over into other meals. You should not have to cook 3 times a day everyday.

Here are some websites that have kid friendly healthy meal ideas:

www.tasteofhome.com

www.delish.com/recipes/best-recipes/kid-recipes

www.myrecipes.com/kids

Right Foods & Right Sizes

Now how do we pick the right foods? First we need to cut back on “empty calories” better known as junk foods. Empty calories are foods that are high in calories but provide little or no nutritional value such as chips, cookies, sugary snack, soft drinks, and ice cream. So come up with a game plan of lower calorie options for your child that actually pack some nutrition into their day such as **fat free popcorn, hummus and raw veggies, fruit, individual no sugar added apple sauce, low fat cottage cheese and yogurts, salsa with multigrain chips.** Basically add more fruits, veggies, whole grains, and low fat dairy, and cut out foods that you can't pronounce the ingredients.

How much of these foods you eat is also important. Try this exercise if your child: a serving of pasta or rice is half the size of their fist, their palm is a serving of meat, a tennis ball is a serving of fruit, the tip of their thumb is a serving of fat, and their whole thumb is a serving of cheese. Explain to them that bigger people can eat more because their hands are bigger and they need more foods.





Additional Ideas to Consider

Choosing the right foods and scheduling meals is a great place to start to help your child achieve a healthier weight. As you continue working on your family's personalized system, here are some more tips to keep in mind:



Create a positive, food-focused environment during meal times

Avoid having the TV on during meal times to help establish “mindful eating” in your child. Hopefully overtime they will be more connected to feelings of hungry and satiety.

Eat as a family as often as your schedule allows, again you are your child's role model and you can set the pace of eating. Finding time for family meals with a busy schedule can be challenging, but planning ahead can help. Let the kids help to plan the menu then stick to it.

Even if your child is not eating at a traditional table setting during meals, attempt to cut out distractions from eating



Do not use food as reward for behaviors

If this is what your family has done in the past, sit down and brainstorm with your children a new system that both you and they are content with.

Try using a points system to reward them, and when they reach a certain goal they are allowed to do certain activities, such as help plan a meal for the family (still keeping the meal healthy).



Promote physical activity

60 minutes per day of physical activity is the recommended amount of activity for school aged children. Make this as fun as possible by enrolling them in group classes such as dance or karate, or inviting friends over to play outside. In the colder seasons it can be more difficult for children to play outside, so try a videogame that requires movement to play the game.

Hand-in-hand with this is limiting the amount of time spent in front of the television or computer. Instead movie nights with the family, go for a walk around the neighborhood or walk to the park. Everyone will benefit from more physical activity.



Cook with you kids!

You don't have to be the next Emeril to impress your kids. Just as they should help plan meals, they should help prepare them as well. The more familiar they become with new foods, the more willing they may be to try them.

Starting with basic ingredients ensures that your meal will have limited added salts, preservatives, and artificial colors, and is the easiest way to boost the nutritional contents of the foods you're eating.

Kids that love food most of the time love cooking; makes all these changes positive for your child and the rest will come naturally!