Healthy Living Everyday

Head Start and Early Head Start programs team up with families as partners in a child’s life. One important goal is to help every child be physically healthy. This includes eating healthy food, getting plenty of exercise and having a healthy weight.

Recent news headlines report a health crisis: younger and younger children are now considered obese. This causes both immediate and long term health problems that we have never before seen in young children.

Medical experts estimate that here in the U.S. 1 in 3 children are obese or overweight.

Why should we all be so concerned? Obese children are more likely to grow into obese adults... and their health problems grow too. Obese children are also more likely to grow into unhealthy adults with life long medical issues and shortened life spans.

Children who are overweight are more likely to develop:

- pre-diabetes, Type 2 diabetes
- heart disease, high blood pressure
- asthma
- disrupted breathing during sleep (apnea)
- bone & joint conditions
- stomach and digestive diseases
- social & emotional problems
- lower self esteem
- the need for hospitalization
What is a Healthy Weight?

Calculate Your Child’s BMI (2 years old+)

You’ll need:

1. Your child’s birth date: ______________.

2. Sex: ____________.

3. Date of the measurements: ____________.

4. Height: ___ ft. ___ in. ___/___ fractions of in.
   - Measure your child’s barefoot height to the nearest 1/8 inch.
   - Stand your child against the wall with his or her heels, backside, shoulders, and head touching the wall.
   - Place a book on top of his or her head, look directly blow the book and mark the child’s height on the wall. Write this above.

5. Weight: ______ lbs. ___/___ fractions of lbs.
   - Place a digital scale on a hard floor. Remove all shoes and all clothing except underwear.
   - Stand the child with both feet in the center of the scale. Record the child’s weight to nearest 1/4 (.25) pound.

6. Use the online calculator on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website.
   - Go to http://r.usa.gov/brBSIS.
   - Plug in the information above and click ‘calculate.’

Adults who are obese usually have a large amount of body fat in relation to their height. They have a higher Body Mass Index (BMI). BMI and waist size determine whether an adult has a healthy weight. Go online at http://r.usa.gov/XBIO5L to calculate your BMI.

BMI for children is more complicated because they are still growing. Only looking at a child’s height and weight won’t give the complete picture. Height and weight charts are no longer considered accurate measures of health for young children. A growing child’s physical portions change as he or she matures.

A healthy infant typically has more body fat and a larger head than a healthy toddler. A healthy weight is based on your baby’s or toddler’s exact age in months, head circumference, as well as height, weight, and gender. They grow so quickly! Ask your Doctor or medical professional about your child’s healthy weight and to explain it.

A healthy weight for a child from 2-19 years old is based on height, weight, exact age, and gender. Doctors use all these measures to calculate your child’s Body Mass Index or BMI. They refer to Clinical Growth charts and tables and let you know if your child has a healthy weight.
Healthy Eating Makes Healthy Weights

Good food and nutrition helps families stay healthy, and healthy children grow bigger and learn better. Your child learns eating and exercise habits from your family. As with all else... the members of a child’s family are his first and most important teachers.

Make this a season to talk about good food at home! Help your child learn about food that is healthy, and food that is not and why.

- Explain that food with lots of sugar, salt and fat may taste good but eating them everyday can hurt our bodies.

- Food that comes in “ready to eat” cartons or in fancy packages often has lots of sugar, salt and fat hidden inside! These are not healthy for our bodies.

- Help your child understand that food packaged in colorful boxes or bags is almost always not as healthy as food that is unwrapped or plainly packaged.

Don’t focus on the weight. Instead, focus on healthy living: good eating habits and physical activity.

— Advice from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Point out that companies who want to sell lots of food will often put bright colors and cartoon characters on the box to make children beg for them. Don’t be fooled!
Nutritious Celebration Suggestions

Did you know that the healthiest foods come in their own “package” or skin such as peas, oranges, apples, fish or chicken? This is because it is fresh and no company added any hidden salt, sugar, fat or chemicals to make it taste better or last longer on the shelf.

You know food is fresh when you can touch it or see it in the package, and it smells good. Choose this kind of food at the grocery store or food pantry whenever you can!

Make a list of all fresh foods your child likes and keep it on your refrigerator. Carry this list when you shop to make good choices.

- Shop for the list of foods with your child and make a point to read the labels.
- Point out the foods that have fat, sugar and salt. If you are receiving food for the big meal from a donation, read each label when you get home.
- Point out that many foods we eat at Thanksgiving are very healthy. Help him or her learn the difference between a vegetable, meat, and dessert.
- Let children know that it is ok to eat a small amount of food that has sugar, fat and salt if you only do it on holidays. The more sugar, salt or fat in a food the smaller the amount you should eat.
- Start a tradition! Let your child pick out a new fruit or vegetable to serve at the meal to give your family something new to try.
- Cook together and make preparing good food the important part of every holiday.