

TEENAGE & CHILDHOOD OBESITY

Recent studies have shown that 30% of our teenagers and children are obese. These are shocking numbers, as they indicate that 3 out of 10 of our youngsters are unhealthy. Considering that youth is the time when our bodies are in full bloom, functioning at peak efficiency, any ill health at this age is very indicative of future diseases. Indeed, research shows that obesity in childhood, especially in the teenage years is very much related to adulthood obesity.

Obesity is a precise scientific term. When your weight, plotted on a growth curve, against height and age, is above the 98th percentile, you are termed obese. For medical professionals, this is not just a cosmetic problem in their patients, but a finding with grave health care concerns. There is no doubt that people who are obese are at greater risk for developing *High Blood Pressure; Diabetes; Heart Attacks and certain Cancers.*

For a child these “health care spills” are of no consequence at all. They live in the here and now and their concrete thinking makes them feel invulnerable to any kind of danger. So if you tell a teenager that he/she needs to lose weight so that they may not develop Diabetes in the future— your advice will fall on dead ears. We can usually relate with adolescents by offering them immediate rewards for the hard task ahead of them. Change of dress size from 12 to 6 is a pretty good incentive for young girls, and young men feel motivated to lose weight when told that this will improve their athletic ability.

With the exception of a few cases, obesity is a simple in and out phenomenon. The calories we consume are balanced by the calories we expend. So, simply speaking, if we eat more than we can burn off, it starts depositing in our bodies, and slowly turns us obese. Dealing with obesity is simple too, but just needs to be consistent. Getting on diets periodically, followed by binge eating, causes more harm than good. A total change of eating habits, as a consistent lifestyle change, is more helpful.

Lack of activity and easy availability of junk food are the evils of our modern day society. 3 well balanced meals a day, eaten at regular hours, keep one satiated, and avoid the problem of “snacking” all day long. Cutting back on the fat in the diet is a good way of making

our food less calorie dense. This makes sense as 1 gram of fat contains 9 calories as compared to 4 in 1 gram of carbohydrate and proteins. So we can eat twice the amount, by eliminating the fat. A small amount of fat is needed for normal functioning of the body. Decreasing the fried foods to a bare minimum and avoidance of snacks like chips, cookies, pizzas, and hamburgers is what's required. Trying alternatives like carrot sticks, fruits, yogurts, skim milk, and juices as in between meal snacks should be encouraged.

Aerobic exercise—like running, walking briskly, skipping, playing ball, etc.—activity that makes you sweat, get short of breath, make your heart beat faster, for 20 to 30 minutes a day, is what is required to burn the calories and help us loose weight.

In short involving kids in a lot of after school activities, and keeping their minds stimulated, helps them to avoid using food as a substitute in their spare time. This avoids overeating and promotes physical activity, both of which we need to fight the problem of obesity.

Finally, I want to say that our kids watch what we do and learn more form our actions than from our words. So let's set a good example for them by making a choice towards a healthier lifestyle ourselves.

EXEMPLARY DIET SHEET:

BREAKFAST

1 CUP OF SKIM MILK

1 PIECE OF FRUIT

1 SLICE OF BREAD WITH JAM OR JELLY

1 HELPING OF SUGAR FREE CEREAL

MAY EAT 1-2 EGGS A WK. AVOID BACON, SAUSAGE, BISCUITS, CHEESE,
BUTTER AND OTHER FATTY FOODS

LUNCH

1 HELPING OF WHITE MEAT (CHICKEN, FISH, TURKEY, etc.)BAKED,
GRILLED, BARBECUED—NOT FRIED

1 HELPING OF STEAMED VEGETABLES (DO NOT ADD FAT BACK OR LARD
TO VEGGIES, DO NOT FRY VEGETABLES)

1-2 SLICES OF WHEAT OR WHITE BREAD

MAY EAT A BOWL OF SALAD WITH FAT FREE DRESSING

DESSERT

JELL-O; FRUIT; YOGURT; ICEMILK; FAT FREE ICECREAM; SORBET

SUPPER

SAME AS LUNCH MAY CHANGE THE MEAT AND VEGETABLES TO A DIFFERENT VARIETY BUT FOLLOW THE SAME PRINCIPLES FOR COOKING

SNACKS

CHILDREN LIKE TO EAT WHEN THEY ARE HUNGRY. THEY WILL NOT BE ABLE TO SUPPRESS THEIR APPETITES. IT IS UP TO AS CARETAKERS TO PROVIDE HEALTHY FOODS FOR THEM, THAT ARE READILY AVAILABLE. SOME GOOD SNACK FOODS ARE:

FRUITS

VEGETABLE STICKS

SALADS

CRACKERS

SUGAR FREE CEREAL

YOGURT

JELL-O

AVOID COOKIES, CHIPS, CAKES, PIES, PIZZA, HAMBURGERS, LOADED HOTDOGS, AND OTHER FATTY SNACKS

THE BASIC IDEA OF THIS DIET IS TO CUT BACK FAT CALORIES FROM THE DAILY INTAKE TO THE BARE MINIMUM. BUT EXCESSIVE CALORIES OF ANY KIND WILL ACCUMULATE IN THE BODY AS FAT. THIS MEANS THAT LARGE INTAKE OF HEALTHY FOODS CAN MAKE ONE FAT ALSO. SO EAT ALL FOODS IN MODERATION AND EXERCISE REGULARLY.