

## **Obesity and Overweight Prevention: Tips for Staying Fit and Healthy**

As your child grows, the doctor will measure your child's body weight and height on a chart to see if he or she is growing properly. Growth charts give normal height and weight ranges for children. They show whether a child's body mass index (BMI) is within normal range. The BMI is the measure of a person's weight compared to height.

Children are considered overweight if their BMI is over 85 percent. A BMI of over 95 percent is considered obese. Your child's doctor, nurse or dietitian can show you the normal height and weight ranges for your child.

Too much weight for a child's height can be unhealthy. Being overweight or obese can increase a child's chances of developing heart diseases, high cholesterol, joint problems, diabetes and many other long-term diseases. Being overweight may also lower your child's self-confidence and lead to depression.

### **Why some children are overweight**

A child's family history can affect the way his body stores or uses food as energy. The tendency to put on weight can "run in families" (be passed down from one's parents). Some medicines, such as steroids and birth control pills, can have weight gain as a side effect. Certain medical conditions may cause weight gain. Most often, though, a child's extra body weight is caused by eating more calories than his body uses each day. Often successful weight loss requires the entire family to make diet and lifestyle changes.

### **Why exercise is important**

The body burns some calories for basic functions like digestion and breathing. Exercise increases a person's metabolic rate, so the body does a better job of burning the calories in the food he eats.

### **How to increase your child's activity**

Make an activity plan with your child. Include fun activities, sports and active chores, such as walking the dog or washing the car. If your child is not used to exercising, start slowly. Increase the amount of activity by a few minutes each day.

*Continued on page 2*

## **How to increase your child's activity, continued**

1. Pick at least one active sport your child enjoys and can play for 10 or 15 minutes at a time, for a total of 30 to 60 minutes most days of the week.
2. Remind your child to stretch before and after any activity to prevent muscle strain.
3. Whenever possible, encourage outdoor play in addition to school or community sports. Have your child wear appropriate gear for the sport he is playing.
4. Limit TV watching and video or computer games to 2 hours a day. Keep televisions out of children's bedrooms.

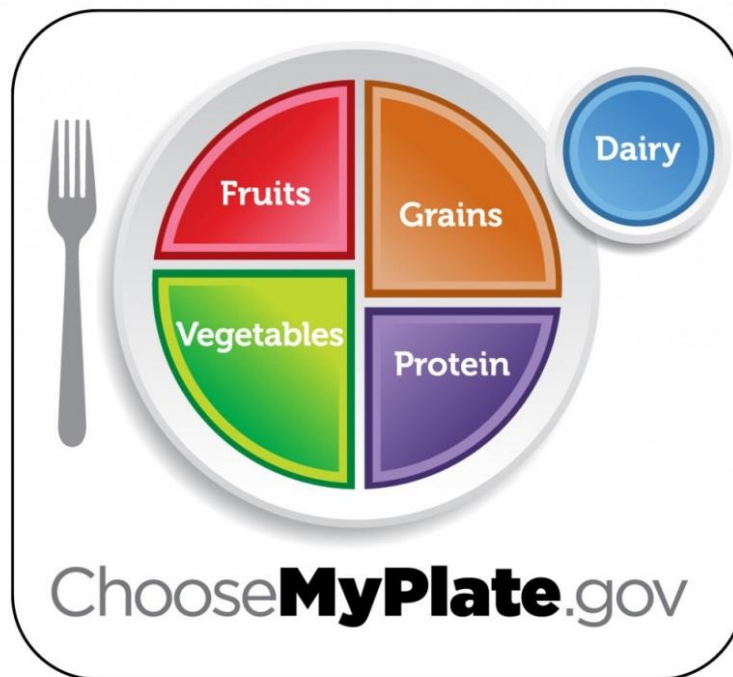
## **Look closely at your child's eating habits**

1. Get rid of soda and sugar-sweetened juices like fruit punch. Children and teenagers should have no more than 4 to 6 ounces of 100% fruit juice per day. Choose diet and "light" drinks when possible. Satisfy thirst with low-fat milk (1%) or water.
2. Include 5 or more servings of fruits and vegetables per day. Children may need to be exposed to new foods 10 to 15 times before they will accept them, so continue offering even if your child refuses at first.
3. Have children eat at the table with family, instead of in front of the TV or on the run.
4. Watch portion sizes. When eating out, never "supersize." Avoid "all you can eat" or buffet-style restaurants. (See portion chart on page 3.)
5. Plan ahead for snack time to help your child make healthy choices and avoid over-eating. Limit the number of sweets and high calorie snacks kept around the house. Include some type of protein in snacks to help to ward off hunger. Examples of protein foods include low-fat milk and yogurt, nuts, beans, peas and low-fat meat. Have kids help to make the snacks themselves. The snack choices list on page 3 gives some ideas.
6. Do not let your child skip meals, especially breakfast. This can lead to overeating and frequent snacking later in the day.
7. Set a good example for your children with your own food choices.
8. Praise your child and provide attention and non-food rewards for good food choices.

## Weight Management: MyPlate

MyPlate is a reminder to make healthy eating a lifestyle and to form good habits for long term weight control.

1. Focus on variety and portion sizes of food groups at each meal. See the MyPlate chart on Page 4.
2. Choose foods and drinks that are low in saturated fat, sodium, and sugars.
3. Start with small changes.
4. Support healthy eating as a family.



Source: [www.choosemyplate.gov](http://www.choosemyplate.gov)

### How large is a "portion" or a "serving size"?

| This Food Portion                           | Is the Size of:            |
|---|----------------------------|
| 1 cup of cooked pasta                       | = 1 computer mouse         |
| 1 cup of cold cereal or 1 medium fruit      | = 1 baseball               |
| 3 ounces of meat                            | = 1 deck of playing cards  |
| 1 ounce of cheese                           | = 4 stacked dice           |
| 1 tablespoon of salad dressing or margarine | = Size of an adult's thumb |
| 2 tablespoons of peanut butter              | = 1 ping pong ball         |

## **Snack choices for weight control**

Snacks are a great way to provide quick energy throughout the day. Snacks can be a good way to add in healthy foods during the day. Children should eat no more than one snack between two meals for portion control. Below are some healthy snack ideas.

- 1 tablespoon peanut butter on celery sticks with 1 cup milk
- 1 can of water-pack tuna with 5 whole grain crackers
- 6- to 8-ounce drinkable yogurt and 1 cup air-popped popcorn
- 2 tablespoons hummus with carrot sticks or a piece of pita bread
- ½ cup of fruit and 1 cup cottage cheese
- One handful of pretzels and one piece of string cheese
- Fruit “pizza” with 1 large rice cake, 1 tablespoon peanut butter or Greek yogurt, and fresh fruit
- Piece of fruit with 1 tablespoon peanut butter
- One handful of whole grain tortilla chips with 2 tablespoons salsa or guacamole
- One piece of string cheese and piece of fruit
- Hard-boiled egg with 5 whole grain crackers
- 6- to 8-oz Greek yogurt topped with fruit

## **Web sites**

For more nutrition information, check these web sites:

[www.choosemyplate.gov](http://www.choosemyplate.gov) – USDA Food Guide

[www.niddk.nih.gov](http://www.niddk.nih.gov) – National Weight Control Information Network

<https://health.gov/DietaryGuidelines/> **Dietary Guidelines for Americans**