

AAP News Parent Plus

INFORMATION FROM YOUR PEDIATRICIAN

Small changes can reduce risk of obesity

With school, activities and work pulling families in different directions, adding in healthy food and exercise can seem overwhelming.

But you don't have to take on major changes all at once, and starting early will save you from problems down the road.

"When pediatricians are your partners in this, small changes that are done consistently day after day can add up to really important results, so don't be afraid to start small and build," said American Academy of Pediatrics President Sandra G. Hassink, M.D., FAAP.

In the past few decades, obesity in children has doubled and even tripled for some ages. It's also dangerous. Obesity can lead to problems like high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, asthma, liver disease and depression.

To prevent obesity, children should eat low-calorie nutritious foods like fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low-fat dairy products, lean meats and fish. Keep fatty and fried foods, baked goods and sweets off the menu.

Fill their cups with water or low-fat or fat-free milk and avoid sweetened drinks like soda and energy drinks. A small amount of 100% fruit juice is OK for children who are at least 1 year old.

If healthy food and drink options are readily available, it will be easier to make good choices. Keep an eye on portion sizes, too. Prepackaged and restaurant portions often are too large. Using smaller plates and bowls and eating meals at the table without TV or distractions also can help prevent overeating.

However, food is only one part of the equation. Kids need to get up and moving, taking part in 60 minutes of physical activity each day. They also shouldn't spend more than two hours in front of the TV or other screens. Children under 2 years of age should not partake in screen time.

Dr. Hassink suggests making one or two of these changes part of your regular routine to start, and then add more as you go. They are more likely to stick if the whole family is involved.

"This is not just about your one child you're concerned about," Dr. Hassink said. "This is about the whole family moving toward a healthier lifestyle."

— *Melissa Jenco*



RESOURCES

- Healthy active living for families, <http://bit.ly/1J40trs>
- U.S. Department of Agriculture dietary recommendations, www.choosemyplate.gov
- Obesity misconceptions, <http://bit.ly/1AwCjVQ>
- Let's Move! initiative, www.letsmove.gov