

Set Good Eating Examples for Kids

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Helping Your Child Maintain a Healthy Weight

Are you worried that your child's weight is abnormal? The right weight for a child depends on several factors, including age and body structure. As a parent, are you wondering what you can do to encourage good eating habits and a healthy weight?

Parents have three responsibilities:

1. Offer nutritious foods at regular times. Planned meals and snacks provide regular sources of energy and help teach good eating habits.
2. Help your child recognize when he is hungry or full. This means not using the clean plate rule and sometimes allowing second or third helpings.
3. Set a good example. Children learn from your actions, whether you're sitting in front of the TV with a bag of chips or drinking nothing but black coffee and exercising for hours.

If your child is overweight, make sure he knows you love him, no matter his size. Do not nag your child about weight--this could lead to body image and self-esteem issues as he gets older. Consider other factors in his weight gain. Medical problems or emotional stress can cause him to eat more or to gain more easily. Children may also gain weight just before a growth spurt.

Here are several tips for helping your overweight child:

- Don't put your child on a diet. Maintain the weight until the child "grows into it"
- Look at the food you serve. Avoid sodas and sweets. Focus on serving whole, natural, low-fat foods such as fresh fruit, vegetables, whole grains, low fat dairy products, and lean meat and fish.
- Learn some cooking techniques to reduce fat. Bake, broil and grill instead of frying.
- Set regular meal and snack times.
- Encourage your child to exercise.
- Limit TV and computer times to less than 2 hours per day. Studies have shown that children who spend more time watching TV tend to be more overweight.

You can help your child control weight by teaching good eating and exercise habits. Provide healthy foods at regular times and help him increase his activity level.

If you have a question, write to Sylvia V. Davis, Family and Consumer Science Extension Agent, University of Georgia Cooperative Extension- Baker County, P.O. Box 220, Newton, GA 39870 or call the Extension office (229)734-3015, weekdays between 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

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