Helping Children Reach a Healthy Weight

Proven Tips for Parents

FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
Miami-Dade County Health Department

www.dadehealth.org

Are you worried about your child's weight or struggling with your own?

You are not alone!

Florida has been named the 29th most obese state in the country, according to the seventh annual F as in Fat: How Obesity Threatens America's Future 2010 report from the Trust for America's Health (TFAH).

The state's adult obesity rate is 26.6 percent, and in Florida, men are more obese than women at 29.1 percent.

Being overweight is not about looks. Many serious health problems are related to being overweight or obese in childhood, such as asthma, depression, diabetes, and heart disease.

Parents and families can do a lot to help children reach a healthy weight. Even a small change in weight reduces the risk of health problems.

First, talk to your health care provider to find out what is a healthy weight range for you and your children.

Second, set a good example. As most parents know, kids are more likely to do what you **do** than what you **say to do**!

Keep in mind that no matter how old you are, weight gain occurs when you eat more calories than you use. Reaching a healthy weight is a balancing act between what you eat (the calories you take in) and what you do (how much physical activity you get).

This guide provides some practical tips that parents have used to help their families stay healthy.

Get Moving!

Physical activity improves your health even if you do not lose weight. Adults should get at least 30 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity (such as a brisk walk) on all or most days. Children and adolescents should be physically active for at least 60 minutes every day. It is okay to get this activity over the course of the day (for example, in several shorter periods of 10 to 15 minutes each).

Examples of Moderate Activities	Examples of Vigorous Activities
Walking briskly Walking downstairs Biking Dancing Swimming Gardening Housework	Jogging Walking upstairs Biking up a hill Aerobics Jumping rope Sports (such as soccer and basketball)

Choose indoor and outdoor activities that you and your children enjoy so they become part of your daily routine. Jump rope, play basketball or handball, take a walk, or play tag. When you are inside, take the stairs, play hide-and-seek or Twister; turn on your favorite music and dance together. You can burn calories and have fun, too.

Walk more. Try getting off the subway or bus stop early and walking the rest of the way. Walk your children to school. Try starting a "walking school bus" in your neighborhood, where parents take turns walking a group of kids. Walking 10 extra minutes burns about 50 calories or up to five pounds a year!

Limit TV, computer games and the Internet to no more than one hour a day. Have fun in other ways: dance to your favorite music, walk the dog, take a class in martial arts, or find activities at a nearby park or recreation center.

Eat Healthy!

Here is a list of common problems and how to solve them.

If You or Your Children…	Instead …
Eat too much	**Eat smaller amounts – bigger is not better.** Use a smaller plate. Check serving sizes on packages. Often a package contains several servings so that means extra calories if you eat the whole thing!
Drink soda and other drinks with sugar	**Drink water or try diet drinks, seltzer, or low-fat milk.**
Eat too few fruits and vegetables	**Serve a fruit and a vegetable at each meal.** When you shop let your children choose some fruits and vegetables they like. Fresh fruits and vegetables are best, but frozen are okay, too. Fruits and vegetables also make great snacks!
Eat fast food	**Avoid large and "super-size" portions.** Compare calorie counts on menus – and choose wisely.
Eat out a lot	**Prepare more meals at home.** Cook with your children. If you do eat out, share an order with your children. If you are served a large portion, set half aside to take home.

If You or Your Children…	Instead…
Eat unhealthy snacks (such as chips, candy, and cookies)	**Snack on fruits and vegetables.** Try carrots, celery sticks, apple slices or strawberries, dipped in low-fat yogurt or peanut butter.
Drink whole or 2% milk.	**Switch to 1% or fat-free milk if your child is over age 2.** They have the same nutrients with fewer calories and less fat.
Eat red meat often	**Try fish, chicken, or turkey.** Broil, grill, or steam meat and fish instead of frying.
Skip breakfast	**Don't skip breakfast!** It gives children energy and helps them to do better at school. Try whole-grain cereal with a sliced banana and low-fat milk. Or, whole wheat toast, an orange and low-fat yogurt or cheese.
Won't eat healthy foods	**Keep trying!** Serve fruits and vegetables often, involve your children in preparing them, and serve as a role model by eating them yourself. Children will eventually eat them!

8 Habits of Healthy Kids

1. Spend at least one hour a day being physically active.

2. Limit TV, computer games and the Internet to no more than one hour a day.

3. Don't eat in front of the TV.

4. Drink water instead of soda.

5. Eat more fruits and vegetables.

6. Eat less fast food (no more than once a week). Choose smaller portions if you do eat out.

7. Snack on healthy foods and eat less junk food and sweets.

8. Switch to 1% or fat-free dairy products if your child is over age 2.

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