

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

As your child grows, the doctor will measure his or her body weight and height on a chart to see if your child is growing properly. The chart gives normal height and weight ranges for children. It shows whether a child's body mass index\* (BMI) is within normal range. Children are overweight if their BMI is over 85%. Those who are more than 95% of BMI are considered obese. Your child's doctor or nurse 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. Also, being overweight can lower your child's self-confidence and lead to depression.

### **Why Some Children Are Overweight**

A child's heredity 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 his 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.

### **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.

\*A measure of a person's weight compared to their height

## 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.

1. Increase your child's total daily physical activity. Pick at least one activity your child enjoys and can be active in 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” his or her muscles 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 protective gear and shoes whenever he or she is involved in sports.
4. Help your child plan TV viewing instead of using it to fill time. Limit TV watching and video or computer games to 2 hours a day. Keep televisions out of children's bedrooms. Studies show that as TV watching increases, so does a child’s weight.
5. For more tips on starting an activity plan, ask your child's nurse for the Helping Hand, *Exercise for Fitness*, HH-II-126.

## Look Closely at Your Child’s Eating Habits

1. Limit soda pop and other sweet drinks including juices. Teens should have no more than 12 ounces per day. Grade school children should have no more than 8 ounces of soda pop or sweet juice per day. Use diet drinks if possible. Satisfy thirst with cold water.
2. Include 5 or more servings of fruits and vegetables per day. Sometimes children need to be given new foods 10 to 15 times before they will accept the food, so continue offering even if your child refuses at first.
3. Have children eat at the table, instead of in front of TV or on the run.
4. Limit the number of sweets and high calorie foods you keep around the house.
5. Watch portion sizes. See Table 1 on page 3.
6. Plan your child’s snacks to help with your child’s nutrition. Avoid over-snacking. If your child is hungry between meals, help him or her to get used to high nutrition choices. Including some type of protein in a snack will help to ward off hunger. Examples of protein foods include low-fat milk and yogurt, nuts, beans and peas and low-fat meat. Table 2 gives some snack ideas. Have kids help to make the snacks themselves.
7. When eating out, never “supersize.” Avoid “all you can eat” or buffet-style restaurants.
8. Don't let your child skip meals, especially breakfast. This can lead to overeating and frequent snacking later in the day.
9. Set a good example for your children by your own food choices.
10. Praise your child and provide attention and non-food rewards for good food choices.

## Weight Management

Your doctor or nurse will talk with you if any testing is needed to check for medical conditions that may be the result of weight gain. Also, a dietitian may help with meal planning or a recreation specialist may help you and your child plan activity time. For long-term weight control, new habits need to be formed.

**Table 1: How large is a "portion"?**

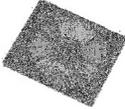
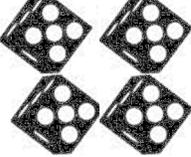
This Food Portion	Is the Size of:
1 cup of cooked pasta	= 1 computer mouse
1 cup of cold cereal	= 1 baseball
3 ounces of meat	= 1 deck of playing cards
1 ounce of cheese	= 4 stacked dice
1 Tbsp. of peanut butter, salad dressing, or margarine	= Size of an adult's thumb
1 slice of bread	= 1 CD case

**Table 2: Snack Choices for Weight Control**

- Peanut butter and jelly on celery sticks with milk
- Single-serve cans of tuna with whole grain crackers
- Drinkable yogurt
- Hard boiled eggs, bread sticks, juice box
- Low fat snacks include fruit, yogurt, raw veggies, pretzels and air-popped corn.
- Hummus with carrot sticks or pita bread

Cut out the card below for serving sizes:

**What One Serving Looks Like:**

Grains and Cereals	Vegetables and Fruit
1 cup of cereal flakes = fist 	1 cup of salad greens = baseball 
1 pancake = compact disc 	1 baked potato = fist 
½ cup cooked rice, pasta or potato = ½ baseball 	1 medium fruit = 1 baseball 
1 slice of bread = cassette tape 	½ cup of fresh fruit = ½ baseball 
1 piece of cornbread = bar of soap 	¼ cup of raisins = 1 large egg  ¼ cup of raisins = 1 large egg 
Dairy and Cheese	Meat and Other Protein Sources
1-1/2 oz. cheese = 4 stacked dice or 2 cheese slices 	3 oz meat, fish and poultry = deck of cards 
½ cup of ice cream = ½ baseball 	3 oz grilled or baked fish = checkbook 
Fats	2 Tbsp. peanut butter = ping pong ball 
1 tsp. of margarine or butter = 1 dice cube 	

Web sites:

[www.mypyramid.gov](http://www.mypyramid.gov) – National FDA website

[www.niddk.nih.gov](http://www.niddk.nih.gov) – National Weight Control Information Network - 1-800-946-8098

[www.healthierus.gov](http://www.healthierus.gov)

[www.Snackwise.org](http://www.Snackwise.org) – Borden Center for Nutrition and Wellness guide to healthy snack choices.