

Kids and dieting: A 'don't', according to experts

If you check out the best-seller list at your local book store, there's a good chance at least one book promotes a new miracle diet. Flip through a gossip magazine and learn how celebrities eat to keep their svelte figures. Ask practically anyone you know and they will surely have a habit they swear by for keeping off the pounds.

With promotions at every turn for diets ranging from no-carb and fruit-only, to high-protein and low-fat, it's no wonder today's girls are body conscious and trying any and all methods to lose weight. Parents are left wondering if and when it's okay for kids to diet — and when they should be concerned.

According to experts at Nationwide Children's Hospital, the words "kids" and "diet" should never be used in conjunction — especially if the diet is one that promises drastic results with little effort.

"Many fad diets endanger your body, cause only temporary weight loss and eventually result in future weight gain," said Lori Mooney, RD, LD, dietitian in the Center for Healthy Weight and Nutrition at Nationwide Children's Hospital. What's most important, according to Mooney and other experts, is talking to your

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kids about healthy eating and keeping tabs on what they are — or aren't — eating.

If your child is concerned about his or her weight, experts suggest stressing the importance of a balanced meal featuring vegetables, fruit, whole grains, quality proteins and low-fat milk and dairy products. For kids and teens looking to eat healthier, first look at their choices in snacks and beverages. Snack foods and sugary drinks comprise 30 percent of daily calories, so swap out calorie-rich and high-fat items for healthier, nutrient-dense options.

To jump-start healthy eating habits in kids, the key is starting them on the right path while they're young. A healthy diet that incorpo-

rates good heart health habits early in life has the potential for long-term benefits. While there is nothing wrong with raising health-conscious kids who make practice of healthy eating habits, parents should pay attention to behaviors that indicate your child is restricting calories or eliminating entire food groups.

"If your child is eliminating one of the three macronutrients — protein, carbohydrates or fats — their diet is not geared toward permanent weight-loss and is not sustainable," Mooney said.

Warning signs that your child has put him or herself on an overly restrictive diet include sudden changes in weight, increased or decreased appetite, changes in eating styles, and not eating at mealtime. If you're concerned about your child's weight or eating habits, contact your pediatrician or primary care physician.

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Certified athletic trainers from Nationwide Children's Sports Medicine demonstrate some simple exercises you can do at home — to build strength and flexibility and help prevent injuries.



Nutritional experts from **Nationwide Children's Hospital** provided the information for this column.