

General Parent Information

An increasing number of children and teens are overweight, and if no intervention is made, 80% of them will stay overweight as adults. This can put them at risk for many medical problems including diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and sleep apnea. Obesity can also adversely affect their self-esteem. While most children should not be put on a severely restricted diet, weight management by a combined approach of a sensible diet and regular exercise will help to control their weight gain.

Every family can assist their child to either maintain or achieve a healthy weight by making healthy choices for his meals at home and encouraging regular exercise and physical activity. You can help him to become more motivated by getting actively involved in the process of eating healthier and exercising regularly. You may also help your child to modify some behaviors that may be associated with the risk of becoming overweight including:

- ❑ Limiting Television, video games and computer time
- ❑ Healthy Eating Habits (3 well-balanced meals of average size and no skipping of meals-don't force your child to clean their plate if they report that they are full as this may not help them develop their own sense of hunger and fullness)
- ❑ Snacks Limit to 2 low-calorie snacks per day such as raw fruits and vegetables or other low-fat snacks.
- ❑ Stock only healthy foods in your home as children can only eat what is available to them. If you provide only healthy choices, they will maintain a healthy diet.
- ❑ Drinking: Encourage your child to drink 4-6 glasses of water each day. Avoid regular soft drinks as they are high in sugar content and calories. Try diet sodas, and low fat or skim milk.

Regular physical activity can also assist your child in maintaining or achieving a healthy lifestyle. Encourage your child to participate in a physical education class at school, and extracurricular sports at school or in the community. Try to find activities that your child enjoys doing. Here are some tips to help your family to increase their physical activity:

- ❑ Walk or ride your bike instead of driving for short distances
- ❑ Take a walk with a friend or walk the family dog each day
- ❑ Use stairs instead of escalators or elevators
- ❑ Park your car at the end of the parking lot and walk to the entrance of the mall or store.
- ❑ Encourage regular exercise for 20-30 minutes 4-5 times each week. This can include walking, jogging, swimming, bike riding, roller-blading, riding a skateboard, etc. It can also include playing a sport such as basketball, volleyball, tennis, soccer, etc.
- ❑ Family Exercise-go for a routine family walk or bike ride in the neighborhood or local park.

If your child struggles with being overweight, be patient and realize that this is a chronic problem. Get the whole family involved. Healthy eating habits and regular exercise should be a regular part of your family's life. It is much easier if everyone in the family is following these guidelines than if your child has to do it alone. Allow your child special

foods or desserts on special occasions. Avoid strict diets, fasting, and crash, liquid or fad diets. They rarely work and will discourage your child from continuing to build healthy habits. Adult diets such as the Atkins diet, cabbage soup diets, have not been proven safe or effective dieting tools for children. Call your health care provider if your child is not having some weight loss with the combination of a healthy diet and exercise, or is suffering from low self-esteem. Consider seeing a dietitian for help with dieting, weight loss, and in planning your family's diet.

It is important to help your child maintain their self-esteem. Some tips to help support your child include:

- Never tell your child that he is fat
- Avoid strict diets
- Do not withhold or deprive your child of food when he/she is hungry
- Avoid overly nagging your child about his weight or eating habits
- Focus on healthy lifestyle habits, not weight loss
- Admire your child (and all people) for their inner self and not their appearance
- Make sure your child knows that being overweight doesn't change what kind of person he is or how much you love him or her.

If your child is underweight, we encourage you to contact your health care provider for an evaluation. Some children and teenagers suffer from eating disorders including anorexia nervosa and/or bulimia. Early risk factors for eating disorders include low self-esteem and being dissatisfied with their body. Some other factors you could look for if you suspect that your child has an eating disorder include:

- Recent weight loss
- A fear of gaining weight or being overweight
- Purging behaviors (vomiting or using water pills or laxatives to lose weight)
- Having a distorted image of their body's size or shape
- Pre-occupation with thoughts of food, calories and their weight
- Restrictive eating patterns (skipping meals, fasting, or eliminating food groups entirely)
- Preference for eating alone
- Absence of menstrual cycles or delayed onset of puberty

Please schedule your child to be evaluated by your health care provider as soon as possible if you suspect he or she may have an eating disorder. There are many serious complications of anorexia, including fainting from low blood pressure, electrolyte disorders, being intolerant to cold, constipation, decreased energy, changes in mood, anemia, kidney failure, brittle bones, heart rhythm abnormalities, heart failure, and death.

If you have any questions about any of this information, please contact your child's school nurse.

Cedar Rapids Community Schools Health Services Staff

Most information obtained from the following website:
www.keepkidshealthy.com