

# PEDIATRIC WEIGHT-MANAGEMENT

## *Helping children lead healthier lives*

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Many parents often have concerns about whether their children are eating enough, eating too much, or eating the “right” foods. Indeed, children’s appetites and nutritional needs change over time, making it difficult for parents to know if their children are eating a healthy, well-balanced diet. One of the best ways to help ensure that your child develops healthy eating and physical activity habits is to take an active role in this process; this includes modeling healthy eating and physical activity habits, making healthy foods/snacks readily available, and having consistent mealtimes. Healthy eating and physical activity habits are not only important for your child’s growth and development, but when established early, will help your child maintain a healthy weight.

On the other hand, unhealthy eating and physical activity habits can contribute to your child becoming overweight and even obese. The increasing number of children who are overweight or obese is linked to decreased physical activity as well as increased consumption of low-nutrition, high-fat and high-sugar food. For example, children who spend more time watching television or playing video games, instead of engaging in physical activity, are more likely to be overweight. Research indicates that children between the ages of 10 and 13 who are overweight or obese are more likely to become obese adults. Thus, the earlier a child is recognized as overweight, the earlier parents can begin making healthy changes for their child and family.

### **What are the concerns?**

Pediatric overweight and obesity are major public health concerns in the United States, with about 33 percent of children overweight and about 17 percent of children obese. These numbers are concerning because pediatric overweight and obesity are related to many negative health consequences in childhood, and even into adulthood. For example, these children are at risk for diabetes, cardiovascular disease, musculoskeletal problems, and even some cancers. Additionally, they are more likely to have mental health issues including lower self-esteem, more symptoms of anxiety and depression, and higher levels of peer victimization and teasing. Further, if children continue to be obese into adulthood, their life expectancies are estimated to be 17 years less than people of normal weight!

### **Is my child at a healthy weight?**

Parents who are concerned about their child’s weight should talk with their pediatricians. For children ages 2 to 19, the most common measurement used to determine a child’s weight status is body mass index (BMI). A child’s BMI is calculated using his or her height and weight and is evaluated using age- and sex-specific charts that account for developmental growth patterns. Research has shown that most parents of children who are overweight perceive their child’s weight to be “just right,” so it is important to talk with your pediatrician about your child’s BMI to ensure you are not missing a weight problem that may be difficult to spot.

A child aged 2 to 19 with a BMI that is:

- below the 5<sup>th</sup> percentile is considered underweight.
- between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 84<sup>th</sup> percentile is considered to be at a healthy weight.
- between the 85<sup>th</sup> and 94<sup>th</sup> percentile is considered overweight.
- at or above the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile is considered obese.

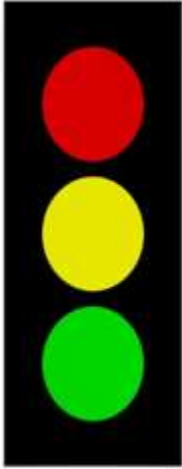
### **How can parents help?**

Not surprisingly, children and their families tend to have similar eating patterns and levels of physical activity. Therefore, one of the best ways to help your child reach a healthier weight is by making healthy lifestyle changes a family commitment. In fact, research has shown that children who are overweight or obese are more successful at losing weight and making long-term lifestyle changes when healthy eating and physical activity are a family affair. As parents, this means serving as a positive role model, encouraging your child, helping your

child set goals, and creating a healthy home environment. Below are many strategies that have been shown to help children and families make healthier food and physical activity choices in order to help children achieve healthier weights.

## GREEN, YELLOW, AND RED FOODS

A simple way to help your child and family make healthier food choices is to think about whether foods are GREEN foods, YELLOW foods, or RED foods. Try replacing YELLOW and RED foods with GREEN foods.



**RED** foods are foods that contain **7 or more grams of fat** per serving or **12 or more grams of sugar** per serving. RED foods should be eaten only once-in-a-while because they are very high in fat and sugar. Examples include “junk food” like pizza, French fries, candy, soda and cake. Your family members should strive to reduce RED foods to four times a week.

**YELLOW** foods are “caution” foods. YELLOW foods are necessary for a healthy diet, but they should be eaten primarily for meals (not snacking), and portion size should be controlled. Examples include lean meats, pastas, skim and 1% milk, and cheese.

**GREEN** foods are foods that can be eaten almost any time because they are low in fat, added sugar and calories. GREEN foods include most fresh fruits and vegetables. Examples of GREEN fruits are apples, peaches, grapes, strawberries, and oranges. Fruit juices and dried fruits are considered YELLOW foods due to their high levels of simple sugars. Examples of GREEN vegetables include spinach, broccoli, carrots and celery. Corn and potatoes are considered YELLOW foods due to their high starch content.

## BEVERAGES

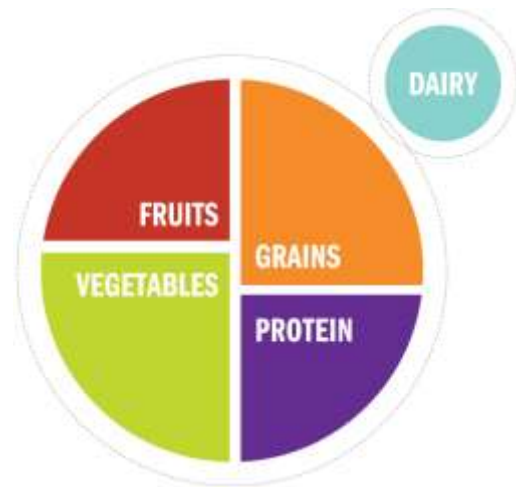
Choosing healthy beverages is an important part of maintaining a healthy diet. To help ensure that your child makes healthy choices, it is important to consider the amount of sugar and calories in beverages. For all children, water, low-fat milk (skim or 1%), and 100% fruit juice (6 ounces or less daily) are the best choices. Sugary drinks (e.g., soda or sports drinks) should be limited because they provide excess calories and affect the amount of calcium in your child’s diet.

Drink (12oz serving)	Teaspoons of Sugar		Calories
Water	0 teaspoons		0
Milk (skim)	4.25 teaspoons		120
100% Juice	9.75 teaspoons		180
Sports Drink	5.25 teaspoons		80
Soda	9.75 teaspoons		140

# PORTION SIZES

Sometimes it is difficult to know whether your child is eating balanced meals. *MyPlate*, created by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, provides an easy-to-follow visual of the different food groups and how they should fill your child's plate to ensure that he or she is eating nutritious, balanced meals!

- Fill half the plate with fruits and vegetables. This is equal to two servings. A single serving of raw fruits and vegetables is about the size of a baseball. Whereas a serving of cooked vegetables is about the size of half a baseball.
- Each meal should contain one serving of grains. This is equal to half a cup of pasta or rice which is about the size of a tennis ball. Be sure to make at least half the grains whole grains!
- Fill the plate with one serving of protein. This is equal to about the size of a deck of cards for meat, poultry and fish, and the size of a golf ball for nuts and peanut butter.
- Drink fat-free or low-fat milk. One serving of dairy is equal to one cup. Other dairy options include fat-free or low-fat yogurt or cottage cheese.



# NUTRITION FACTS

Food labels are found on nearly all packaged foods and provide important information about the nutritional values, ingredients, and calories in the food. This information can help parents and children make informed choices about healthy eating.

**Serving size** is the amount of food that provides the nutritional values listed on the label. For example, one serving of chips is equal to 32 chips, 160 calories, and 10 grams of fat.

**Servings Per Container** is the number of servings in the whole package. For example, this bag of chips has 3 servings per bag.

**Calories** are what the body uses for energy. The number of calories on a food label indicate the amount in one serving size. For example, one serving of chips (32 chips) has 160 calories.

**Total Fat** indicates the amount of fat in one serving size. It is recommended to choose foods that have 3 grams of fat or less for every 100 calories per serving.

**Saturated fats** should be limited (less than 1% of total calories)

**Trans fats** should be limited (less than 1% of total calories)

**Sugars** should be limited, especially foods that contain added sugars. Added sugars provide calories without other nutrients and are found in processed foods or beverages.

## Nutrition Facts

Serving Size 1 oz. (28g/About 32 chips)  
Servings Per Container 3

Amount Per Serving

Calories 160    Calories from Fat 90

% Daily Value\*

Total Fat 10g    16%

Saturated Fat 1.5g    7%

Trans Fat 0g

Cholesterol 0mg    0%

Sodium 170mg    7%

Total Carbohydrate 15g    5%

Dietary Fiber 1g    4%

Sugars less than 1g

Protein 2g

Vitamin A 0%    •    Vitamin C 0%

Calcium 2%    •    Iron 0%

Vitamin E 6%    •    Vitamin B6 2%

Phosphorus 4%

# PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

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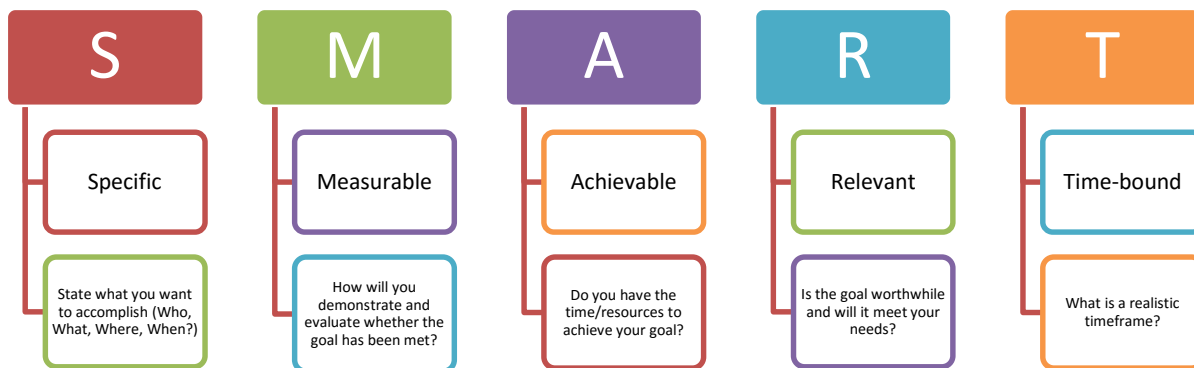
Physical activity is an important part of a healthy lifestyle. Physical activity helps children maintain a healthy weight, build strong bones and muscles, improve sleep quality, and decrease their risk of obesity. It is recommended that children get 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity every day for optimal health and well-being. Moderate physical activity includes activities that have a similar intensity to walking briskly, whereas vigorous physical activity refers to activities with a similar intensity to running. One of the easiest ways to encourage your child to be more active is to limit the amount of time he or she spends in sedentary activities. Sedentary activities include any activities where your child is sitting or lying down. One of the most common sedentary activities is “screen time” (i.e., time watching TV or DVDs, playing video games, text-messaging, or using the computer). In fact, the average child spends about eight hours in screen time every day, which is concerning because healthcare providers recommend that children spend no more than two hours in screen time each day.

Instead of screen time or other sedentary activities, increase physical activity by being active as a family. Some families like to take walks or bike ride together after dinner, or to school a few days a week. Other families like to get children involved by making cleaning the house or performing household duties both fun and active. For example, make cleaning the house a family game, or wash the car, rake leaves, or shovel snow together. In addition to participating in physical activity as a family, children can also benefit from participating in physical activity with other children. Think about signing your child up for school sports or after-school or community programs where your child can make friends and develop social skills while being physically active.

## SET GOALS

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Parents often set unclear and unrealistic goals for their children and their families, which can lead to disappointment and frustration. Setting food and activity goals that are S.M.A.R.T. will increase the likelihood of success.



Example of a S.M.A.R.T. goal: For breakfast at home, I will replace Jimmy’s poptarts with ½ of a sliced apple every day for a week. First, I will remove the poptarts from the house. Then, I will buy apples at the grocery store and cut the apples into slices so they will be ready for Jimmy in the mornings.

# MONITOR GOALS

Once you set food and activity goals, you can further increase the likelihood of success if you monitor your behaviors. There are a variety of ways to track goals, but the important part of choosing a tool is picking one that works best for your family. Put your monitoring chart on the refrigerator at home to help serve as a visual reminder of your goals.

Example monitoring charts:

	Monday	Grains	Vegetables	Fruits	Dairy	Protein
Breakfast					★	
Lunch		★				★
Dinner		★			★	★
Snacks			★	★ ★		

**SMART GOAL:** For breakfast at home, I will replace Jimmy's poptarts with ½ of a sliced apple every day for a week. First, I will remove the poptarts from the house. Then, I will buy apples at the grocery store and cut the apples into slices so they will be ready for Jimmy in the mornings.

Monday	✓
Tuesday	✓
Wednesday	
Thursday	
Friday	✓
Saturday	
Sunday	

# BE A MODEL

Your child wants to be just like you! Model the behaviors you want to see from your child, and your child will be more likely to follow your lead and make healthy changes. For example, be excited to try new fruits and vegetables. Eat together and let your child see you enjoying healthy food and physical activity.

# PRAISE YOUR CHILD

To help your child achieve goals, praise your child for his or her efforts. When parents immediately praise their children by telling them exactly what behaviors they like and approve of, children are more likely to repeat the behavior in the future.

Labeled Praise: "You made a great choice in eating fruit for breakfast, Jimmy!"

Jimmy now knows he gets positive attention from his parent when he chooses fruit for breakfast. He is more likely to repeat this behavior in the future.



# IGNORE NEGATIVE BEHAVIORS

Sometimes, your child may have negative behaviors at mealtime including refusing to try new foods. Seeing your child cry or get angry is hard, and it may seem easier just to give in. But kids are smart, and your child will learn that if he or she throws a tantrum, you will not make him or her eat vegetables. Do not give your children attention for behaviors such as complaining about GREEN foods or begging for RED foods. Instead, try ignoring this behavior by not making eye contact, turning away from the child, and refraining from commenting on the negative behavior. You can then praise your child when he or she engages in a more appropriate behavior.

# RESOURCES

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## Websites

### Parents:

<http://www.choosemyplate.gov/>

[http://kidshealth.org/parent/nutrition\\_center/](http://kidshealth.org/parent/nutrition_center/)

<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/educational/wecan/>

### Children:

<http://kidshealth.org/kid/>

<http://www.letsmove.gov/kids>

<http://www.choosemyplate.gov/kids/>

<http://www.cdc.gov/bam/>

## Books

Sothorn, M., von Almen, T. K., & Schumacher, H. (2003). *Trim kids: The proven 12-week plan that has helped thousands of children achieve a healthier weight*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.

This book follows a 12-week program that is aimed at helping children lose weight and maintain a healthy lifestyle. It includes more detailed information about how to know if your child is overweight, how to make healthy food choices, how to encourage physical activity, and how to make behavioral and lifestyle changes.

Epstein, L. H., & Squires, S. (1988). *The stoplight diet for children: An eight-week program for parents and children*. Boston, MA: Little, Brown, and Co.

This book is an excellent resource that is written by a leading researcher in childhood obesity and is targeted towards helping both children and parents make healthy food choices.