

Pediatric Obesity Prevention Measures



NBC's hit show *The Biggest Loser* brings overweight people from across the country to a ranch and helps them lose massive amounts of weight. Jared Fogle was an instant celebrity when he lost over 240 pounds by eating Subway. Tabloids are constantly printing headlines of which celebrity has gained weight and who lost their baby weight the fastest. Why the craze in losing weight? Well, in the country of "super size" meals and decreased physical activity, obesity rates are staggering. And it's a huge problem (no pun intended).

Obesity rates have increased in 23 states and did not decrease in a single state in 2009. And unfortunately, this epidemic is affecting children perhaps more than adults. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, one of seven low-income, preschool-aged children is obese in America. And growing up at an unhealthy weight makes it even more difficult to lose it later in life. But why are our children gaining weight? Look around! Thanks to industrialization, food can be found everywhere and in large quantities. Store are full of everything from the veggies we need to the potato chips we craze. In fact, according to the best-selling book, *Fast Food Nation*, American children now get about one-quarter of their total vegetable servings in

the form of potato chips and French fries. French fries!! Poor nutrition and lack of regular exercise can lead to very serious health problems, all of which we can learn to prevent.

EFFECTS OF OBESITY IN CHILDREN

- High blood pressure, high cholesterol and abnormal blood lipid levels
- Insulin resistance and type 2 diabetes
- Bone and joint problems
- Shortness of breath and increased risk of developing asthma
- Disordered sleep patterns
- Increased risk for substance abuse
- Liver and gall bladder disease
- Depression
- Increased chance of developing unhealthy dieting habits and eating disorders

Action needs to be taken now! There are simple things we can start doing now to keep our children healthy and happy. Share these tips today.

PREVENTING OBESITY IN CHILDREN

- **Calculate BMI:** Have your pediatrician calculate and plot your child's Body Mass Index once a year. This will help identify if the child is gaining weight at an unhealthy rate. This

will also help identify children who are at risk of becoming overweight.

□ Doctors consider a teen obese when his or her BMI number is higher than the BMI numbers of 95 percent of other teens the same age and gender.

- **Promote healthy food:** Teach kids about nutritious snacks, like vegetables and fruits, and whole grains at an early age. This will help them be more aware and make the right choices when it comes to eating.
- **Get organized:** Take a look in the pantry and organize the shelves according to health value. If you can't toss all your junk food, make sure the healthiest snacks are at eye level for your kids. If they can't reach the potato chips, they may just settle for almonds.
- **Get them active:** Don't wait for the physical education teacher to promote physical activity. Parents can play games at home, introduce group sports and promote outdoor activity.
- **Don't be afraid of restaurants:** You don't have to stay home and cook healthy meals. Restaurants and even fast food chains are offering healthier foods like salads, fruit sides and other healthy alternatives.
- **Turn off the TV:** Don't let television and video games become babysitters. Instead, set a limit of two hours per day (maximum) for entertainment.
- **Hide the veggies:** If your kids despise all things vegetables, puree them and hide them in pasta sauce or soup. Your child can enjoy a slice of pizza and still get the veggies he needs. ■

Lauren Himiak is a freelance writer for ADVANCE.

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