

## September 2013: Live Your Best Life

Healthy Living at Every Age

### Talking to Children About Weight



In today's society, weight is a sensitive topic, especially for children and teens. Deciding how to discuss this topic with children is tricky for many parents and caregivers. However, with 1 in 3 children and 2 in 3 adults in the United States being overweight or obese (CDC), the subject is bound to be brought up in some way, shape or form.

Deciding how to approach weight issues with young

people deserves careful attention; how you handle the topic can have serious and lifelong implications. Here are some tips for discussing weight with children, and what to do if a child brings up the topic on their own:

#### What to Do

**Lead by example.** When it comes to weight, experts agree that children tend to more closely follow what their parents do, rather than what they say.

**The key is health, not weight.** Focus on healthy eating and praise positive lifestyle choices, rather than dieting and losing weight. Praise your children when you see them making healthy choices.

**Tell your child that you recognize how hard it is** to make healthy choices at times. Ask your child how you can help them develop healthier habits.

**Make sure to point out things that you genuinely consider nice** about your child's personality: they are a hard worker, good friend, smart student, etc. Also point out things that you appreciate about their appearance: their choice of clothes, their eyes, hair, etc.

**Know that it is never too late to start developing healthy habits.** Perhaps you and your family haven't always made healthy choices in the past, but today is a new day. Improving your own lifestyle can inspire your child to do the same.

**Find out what's going on with your child socially and at school.** Being overweight can sometimes be a symptom of a deeper issue that your child is experiencing - such as depression, bullying/teasing, or other health concerns. Seek professional help if necessary.

**Make it clear that you love your child unconditionally.** Kids need to know that what you feel about them has nothing to do with their weight.

#### Additional Resources

- [Let's Move](#)
- [Eat Right](#)

**Get everyone involved!** Try these healthy family activities:

- Prepare family meals together
- Take a healthy cooking class together
- Increase the amount of outdoor play time and limit the amount of screen/electronics time
- Create regular family play time Increase the amount of fruits and vegetables served at family meals and at snack time
- Limit the number of sweets (food and beverages) your family eats each week Increase the number of meals that the family eats together
- Shop for healthy foods together and pick out a new fruit or vegetable to try each week

### What to Say

*“How do you feel about your weight? Remember, when you’re carrying around extra weight, it’s not about how you look, but how you feel.”*

*“Some kids have health issues like asthma, food allergies, or trouble concentrating. Having too much weight can hurt your health, too.”*

*“Losing extra weight is not easy for anyone. It’s also very difficult to do alone. There are a lot of things that can get in the way of eating healthy and getting enough exercise everyday. (Ask your child about specific examples from your community, home or family routine that might present a problem.) But, it’s really important, so let’s work on these things together.”*

*“Let’s think about things we can do as a family to be more healthy. Can you think of some ideas that we can do to get healthier together?”*

### What to Avoid

- Don’t complain or make negative comments about your own weight.
- Don’t comment negatively about other people who are overweight.
- Avoid shame, blame and anger. Never yell, scream, bribe, threaten or punish children about weight, food/eating habits or physical activity.

## Reducing Cholesterol

According to the CDC, more than 70 million Americans have high cholesterol (above 200 mg/dL), which is linked to hypertension, heart disease and stroke. If you are one of the 70 million, don’t worry. Take action instead. There are a variety of strategies you can use to lower your cholesterol and decrease your risk for heart problems.

Here’s the skinny on the troublesome fat your body makes called cholesterol:

Chances are good that you may not need drugs to keep it in check. True, people with a strong genetic predisposition for high cholesterol need medication to control cholesterol, but many don’t. For most, lifestyle changes are the key to maintaining a healthy balance between bad cholesterol, LDL, which clogs the arteries, and good cholesterol, HDL, which combats the clogging process.

### Reducing Cholesterol with a Healthy Diet

Experts agree that a nutritious, well-balanced diet is associated with lowered cholesterol levels in adults.



### Additional Resources

- [American Heart Association](#)
- [CDC Resource on Cholesterol](#)

**Start on the path to lower cholesterol today by incorporating the following healthy eating habits into your everyday routine:**

- Eat plenty of fruits and vegetables. (8-10 servings a day)
- Choose whole grains, i.e., 100% whole wheat bread, oats, whole wheat pasta, brown rice and whole grain cereal. (6 or more a day)
- Switch to fat free or low fat milk or dairy products. (2-3 servings a day)
- Consume nuts and seeds in limited amounts. (4-5 servings a week)
- For protein, prepare lean meats and poultry without the skin on (5-6 ounces a day)
- For vegetarians, 1 egg, 1/4 cup of cooked beans, 1 tablespoon of peanut butter, or 1/2 ounce of nuts or seeds can be counted as an ounce of meat.
- Select fatty fish rich in Omega-3's such as halibut, lake trout, salmon and tuna. (at least 2 servings a week, 3-4 ounces each, baked or grilled)

**Consider these tips for healthy, low-cholesterol cooking:**

- Use vegetable oils like olive, soybean, corn or canola instead of butter, margarine or lard.
- Limit saturated fat (red meat, cheese, fried foods, solid fats like butter, margarine or lard, whole milk or cream, baked goods and egg yolks), trans fat (avoid foods with "partially hydrogenated" oils in the ingredient list) and sodium.
- Limit your dietary cholesterol; Aim for no more than 300 milligrams (mg) of cholesterol a day, or less than 200 mg if you have heart disease; The most concentrated sources of cholesterol include organ meats (liver, kidney, sweetbreads), egg yolks and whole milk products. ]

**Reduce Cholesterol with Regular Exercise**

Regular physical activity is critical to decreasing cholesterol levels. Exercise reduces not only total cholesterol, but also LDL or "bad" cholesterol as well as triglycerides. Regular exercise also increases HDL or "good" cholesterol.

The American Heart Association recommends 30 minutes of moderate exercise, such as brisk walking, biking, dancing or jogging, most days, if not every day. Short on time? Break up those 30 minutes into two or three blocks of 10-15 minutes throughout your day.

**What Else Can I Do?**

**Limit alcohol use.** In some studies, moderate use of alcohol has been linked with higher levels of HDL cholesterol, but the benefits aren't strong enough to recommend alcohol for anyone who doesn't drink already. If you drink alcohol, do so in moderation. For men, that means no more than two drinks per day; for women no more than one a day.

**Reduce stress.** It may help keep your cholesterol in check.

**Avoid tobacco and second hand smoke.** Smoking raises triglyceride levels and increases the risk for metabolic syndrome.

**Maintain a healthy weight.** If you are overweight or obese, losing as little as 5-10% of your body weight can reduce your cholesterol and other risk factors. To determine your ideal weight talk with your doctor.

**Talk with your doctor.** Have your cholesterol tested regularly.

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