

[IMAGE]

Teaching Kids to Eat Healthy: Your Role as a Parent

Parents play an important role in helping kids reach and maintain a healthy weight.

By Editorial Staff

Temptation appears around every corner. The kitchen is full of sweet and salty snacks, and the television is constantly transmitting messages about the biggest burger, the gooiest desserts or the largest cup of soda that can be purchased for under a buck. Kids and adults are faced with tough decisions every day about what to eat, when to eat it and how big of a portion to take. As parents, it's our job to make sure our kids are winning the battle of the bulge and growing into adults who make smart, healthy choices.

A young girl tries to decide between a candy bar and an apple. - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark

Families that have successfully tamed the calorie and junk-food beast have several things in common. First, the kids realized there was a problem with their weight and took the initiative to do something about it, independent of their parents. It's a delicate line for parents, since you don't want to pressure your kids to lose weight, as that can sometimes cause them to stress and worry about their weight and overeat even more. Kids who successfully kept off the pounds also drew tremendous support from their parents and siblings, especially when the family adopted all aspects of the struggling child's new, healthy lifestyle. Parents can help set the tone for success by having healthy, low-calorie foods in the house, exercising with their kids and helping to control portion size.

It's also important for families to develop a health regimen that works for them and is conducive to their lifestyle. For some, this might involve nutritional counseling, joining a sports team, or counting calories and measuring food portions. Staying connected with others fighting the same battle also is a great form of moral support and encouragement. It's also important to give kids time to lose the weight and remind them that success is not just measured on the scale and that gradual weight loss is one of the keys to long-term success in weight management.

Five Comments Parents Should Avoid

A young girl tries to decide between a candy bar and an apple. - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark

Parents often have the best of intentions, but sometimes what they say can hurt a child and deter their weight loss. Here are just a few comments parents should avoid when dealing with a child fighting to lose weight:

1. "You're just big-boned compared to your brother or sister." Comparisons of any kind between siblings can cause major problems in any family, but especially when weight is involved.
2. "Maybe you could try a different diet." While this might sound encouraging, it insinuates that the child isn't trying hard enough or that what they are doing isn't good enough.
3. "I didn't like my body when I was younger either." This comment promotes the idea that poor body image is ok, which could cause problems later in life.
4. "You're so great at (fill in the child's preferred sport)! Maybe you should try and take it to the next level." Some kids have a natural competitive streak while others do not. It's important to understand what will motivate your child and keep them positive.
5. "You look wonderful! Have you lost weight?" While this might seem like the perfect thing to say to someone trying to lose weight, it often can have a detrimental effect if that's the only thing you're praising about your child.

So stay positive and get in the trenches to fight the battle with your kids. Now's the time to begin a family legacy of healthy eating habits and regular exercise that can be passed down from generation to generation.

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