

[IMAGE]

Teach Your Children About Heart Health

By Editorial Staff

It's hard to turn on the TV or pick up a newspaper these days without hearing about the epidemic that is childhood obesity. Let's face it, the statistics are grim: According to the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, the rate of obesity among children ages 6 to 11 has more than doubled in the past 25 years, from 6.5 percent in 1980, to 17 percent in 2006. And the obesity rate among adolescents ages 12 to 19 has more than tripled, increasing from 5 percent to 17.6 percent.

In light of these sobering statistics, it might be tempting to have the family doctor prescribe cholesterol-lowering drugs such as statins. After all, pharmaceutical companies go to considerable lengths to promote cholesterol-lowering drugs to doctors and the public. However, except for a very few children who are genetically predisposed toward high cholesterol, drugs are not the answer. Instead, it comes down to changes in lifestyle, according to Jennifer Li, a pediatric cardiologist at Duke University Medical Center.

Here are some of Dr. Li's suggestions to help your kids improve their heart health and avoid the perils of high cholesterol:

Kid with drawing - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark **Exercise as a family.** Kids need motivation to exercise, and who better than mom or dad to show them the way? Dust off those sneakers and start playing catch, kicking a soccer ball or just taking the dog for a brisk walk or run.

Shop and cook healthy. Say goodbye to junk food and sweetened beverages (including sports drinks). Instead, incorporate more fruits and veggies into the family diet, along with whole grains and lean sources of protein, such as chicken and fish.

Don't eat on the run. Limit your drive-though meals and don't let your kids grab and go, either. Try to eat meals at home as a family whenever possible. Offer fruits, vegetables and other healthy snacks to beat those midday hunger pangs.

Reduce TV time. The average child watches television for a whopping six hours a day. That's six hours doing nothing except staring at the screen - and probably eating unhealthy snacks. Television and video

games should be a reward for eating right and exercising, not a daily ritual.

Know your numbers. Get the whole family's blood pressure, cholesterol and blood sugar levels tested periodically. If there's a problem, catch it before it becomes a bigger one. Abnormal lab tests also help establish attainable goals for everyone.

Get organized. If your child already is overweight or obese, consider getting them into a formal weight-management program. Nutritional counseling and supervised exercise sessions can give a child the support and motivation they need to lose weight.

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