



WEIGHT ★ NO ★ MORE DIET CENTERSM



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A CHILD'S WEIGHT CAN'T WAIT!

In the United States today one out of five children and teens is "medically overweight," and that percentage is increasing at a fast rate—childhood obesity has doubled since the 1970's. "Socially overweight" means that a child is embarrassed about their weight and perhaps gets teased about it. "Medically overweight" means that a child's weight is a risk to their health.

Parents must understand that if there is excessive fat on the outside of your child's body, there is also excessive fat on the inside— i.e., in the body's organs. Fat build-up in organs such as the heart, the arteries, the liver and pancreas causes these organs to function poorly.

- (1) Diabetes mellitus (more commonly known as "Type 2 Diabetes"), due to a deficiency of the pancreas, is on the rise in obese adolescents.
- (2) Overweight children have more bone and joint problems, simply because of the mechanical stress which the extra weight puts on bone and joint structures.
- (3) High fat, high sugar foods that overweight kids and teens consume causes fatty deposits called "plaque" to form on the inside of the arteries that supply organs like the heart, the brain and the kidneys. (This plaque eventually blocks normal flow of blood to those organs. Moreover, pieces of plaque can suddenly break off and totally block the blood flow downstream. This results in a "heart attack" in the case of the heart, or a "stroke" in the case of the brain. Plaque deposits also cause "hardening of the arteries," which results in high blood pressure, kidney failure, and broken arteries in the brain, another form of stroke.)

Children who are obese usually refer to themselves (as do their parents) as having a "weight problem." Actually, what most overweight kids have is an "eating problem." And while a very, very small percentage of obesity in childhood is due to hormonal abnormalities, the vast majority of childhood obesity is due ONLY to over-eating. Quite simply: They eat more than they burn up. The reasons for excessive food intake by children can be varied, running the gamut from depression to anxiousness to low self-esteem or just plain boredom as all these "conditions" are often relieved by some pleasurable activity— and food is one example. Since we do not feel pleasure and emotional pain at the same time, the emotional pain returns as soon as the food is consumed. Using food as a way to neutralize emotional pain can actually result in "food addiction," wherein the child becomes psychologically hooked on food to keep from feeling emotional discomfort.

Children must learn that tolerating life's pains is necessary to avoid food addiction. Once a kid gains excessive weight, it requires even more will power to tolerate the discomfort of hunger in order to lose the weight. In addition, the decrease in self-esteem and social isolation associated with being overweight causes even more depression, so that the overeating increases even more. This is referred to as the "vicious circle" effect. Overweight control requires breaking this vicious circle. The child must realize that gaining more weight will just increase their unhappiness and make it even more difficult to do something about the weight. This is because the longer a child carries excess weight, the greater the probability of becoming an overweight teenager. Most overweight teenagers become overweight adults. Obese adults have a much higher rate of diabetes, cardiovascular disease and cancer.

Hunger is what we feel when our body is lacking in the nutrition of food. A craving is what we feel when we want the pleasure of food. If a child eats for pleasure rather than for nutrition, excessive weight gain is usually the result. Help your children to learn how to eat for nutrition rather than for pleasure. Teach your children that it's OK to be hungry sometimes.

Some Tips to Help Prevent Children from Over-Eating

1. **Children's good eating habits begin with the adults at home.** Kids will mimic their parents' good and bad eating habits. Consider that if only high fat, sweet and low-nutrition food is mostly available, this is what children will eat. Parents need to be role models to their kids FOR EVERYTHING—and certainly for healthy eating and active lifestyles. For example, if veggies and low-fat dip are offered as an after-school snack, and cookies are not available, children will learn to eat what is offered. Eliminate unhealthy foods from your household rather than singling out a child and prohibiting him/her from eating them. Save sweet desserts for celebrations like birthdays and holidays.
2. **Teach your children to "Just Say No!" to excess food and junk food.** Praise your children when they resist temptation. Eating discipline is like any other form of discipline. It has to be taught and reinforced by the parents.
3. **All eating at home needs to occur at the kitchen table, even snacking.** No nibbling in front of the TV, no box of cookies in the bedroom, no dish of ice cream at the computer. Keep healthy snacks in a place where your children can easily get to them.
4. **Help your child to find sources of pleasure and fun other than food.** Hobbies, sports, dancing, bike riding, roller blading and exercise can relieve boredom and offer distraction from depression and anxiousness. They will also increase activity. Make time to exercise WITH your children. If you see your children snacking excessively, ask them, "Are you really hungry or are you bored or unhappy?" If the latter, encourage them to express themselves in ways that don't revolve around food—keeping a diary, painting, playing an instrument.
5. **Limit TV watching.** For the average child, watching TV accounts for 24 hours a week of sedentary behavior—hardly any calories burned while sitting and usually a whole lot of calories consumed while doing so!!
6. **Help your children to love themselves.** Praise your children's strengths and skills. It is important to de-emphasize weight and emphasize feeling healthy and strong.

While weight gain in children can occur at any time, many parents don't address the issue until it becomes a much BIGGER problem. When you wait until it's a problem of larger proportions, it's that much harder to treat. The bottom line is this: Over-eating is just a habit, and any habit can be broken.