

Strategies for Weight Control

by Marc Jacobson, MD, FAAP

Uh, oh! When the nurse plotted your height and weight on a graph showing what most kids your age weigh at your height, you were in the zone labeled “overweight.” The good news is that you’re not alone: more than one in five teens in the U.S. are overweight. The bad news is that being overweight puts stress on your joints as well as your heart and lungs, slows you down, and may cause other health problems.

If your doctor thinks that you need to pay more attention to diet and exercise, here are some ideas to change your eating habits and ramp up your activity level!

Eat Less, Move More

Your body is like a machine. It runs on energy that we call calories. If you burn more calories than you take in, you’ll lose weight. Forget the fad diets: they don’t work in the long run. Just remember that whatever you eat or drink adds calories that you need to burn up before they get stored as fat. If you exercise enough to use more calories than you take in, your body will burn fat for energy and you’ll lose weight.

So let’s attack this on two fronts: energy intake (how much you eat) and energy-burning (how much you move or exercise).

Energy In: What You Eat and Drink

- **Eat breakfast.** More calories? Yes. But these are all-important calories that jump-start your metabolism and power your brain for the day.
- **Try different fruits and vegetables** when you want a snack. Plan to eat 5 servings of vegetables and/or fruits a day. They’re great for nutrients and for fiber, which will help you slim down.
- **Think twice about high-sugar or high-fat snacks.** Then think again. A few extra cookies can cancel out a whole day’s careful choices.
- **Read those food labels.** Look for snacks with less than 10 grams of sugar, less than 2 grams of saturated fat, and more than 2 grams of fiber **per portion** on the label. Figure out how many portions you are going to eat before you start to snack.
- **Pay attention to what you drink.** Soda pop, juice, sweet teas, and regular (whole) milk have far more calories than water, skim milk and diet drinks. So think before you drink! Skim milk and fat-free yogurt are good sources of calcium and are NOT fattening!

Energy Out: Activity Tips

- **Plan to “get moving” for at least 30 minutes each day.** A brisk walk is a good start.
- **Set limits on your TV, computer, and video game time.** Allow yourself no more than 2 hours “screen time” per day.
- **Join a sports team.**
- **Try an individual sport,** like tennis, golf, handball, or racquetball.
- **Check out exercise classes in your community.** Learn to spin, lift free weights, or practice self-defense.
- **Compete against yourself** in an activity like walking, jogging, swimming or biking.
- **Walk to school, to work, or to see friends.**
- **Think creatively about what you do for fun.** When you’re out with friends or on a date, try skating or dancing instead of dinner and a movie.
- **Check out different choices until you find something fun.** You’re more likely to stick with it and will probably forget that it’s “exercise.”

Great Sources on the Internet:

www.eatright.org

Nutrition resources and facts from the American Dietetic Association

www.usda.gov/cnpp/AboutCNPP.html

Food facts from the US Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion.

www.kidnetic.com

A project of the nonprofit International Food Information Council

Some Ideas for Better Fast Food Choices

- Choose diet soda, water, or low-fat milk to drink
- Skip the French fries and select a side salad with light dressing
- Try a grilled (not fried) chicken sandwich without sauce
- Ask for small fries rather than large
- Try a breakfast sandwich on an English muffin instead of a croissant

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