

Nutrition

Is My Child Overweight/Obese?

In 2010, 1 out of 3 children in the United States was overweight or obese. Body Mass Index (BMI) is widely used to help categorize weight. BMI compares height and weight, and norms vary by age and sex. A BMI between the 85th and 95th percentile is defined as overweight and a BMI at or above the 95th percentile is defined as obese. If your BMI is in the overweight or obese zone, talk to your doctor about developing a healthy eating plan.

- **Early adolescence is a time of increased independence, increased peer influence, and shifts in meals and sleep patterns.** While our children will push to have choices, they need and desire decision support. Parents and the home are the greatest influence. Healthy nutrition habits are formed at home. Parents need to model healthy behaviors. Actions speak louder than words. A family approach to healthy eating habits and activity is important.
- Healthy food choices as well as structured, predictable meal and snack times are important for parents to establish. It is easier for your child to manage their hunger if they know when they can expect their next meal or snack. Parents determine the food choices a child has at home when they shop at the grocery store. Stock your home with plenty of fruits, vegetables, whole grain products, and low-fat, low-sugar snacks. Limit your buying of cookies, sodas, and chips. Occasional treats like ice cream are fine, but nutritious options for healthy snacks include:
 - Fresh fruit or dried fruit
 - Low-fat/frozen yogurt
 - Celery stalks, cucumber slices
 - Frozen banana slices or frozen grapes
 - Baked potato chips
 - Bran muffins
 - Air popped or low-fat popcorn
 - Low-fat cheeses
 - Crackers or unsalted pretzels
 - Sugar-free cereals
 - Adding a protein food makes snacks more satisfying. Try adding yogurt, a boiled egg, cheese sticks, peanut butter, or nuts to a snack.
- **In general, children this age need to have 3 well-balanced meals and 1 to 2 healthy snacks a day.** Early lunch periods, eating to unwind, and boredom can all contribute to over-snacking. Stopping at a store after school may also lead to increased, unhealthy snacking. Limiting snack money and discussing healthy choice may help. Oversee your child's selections of snacks and have a plan for the after-school snack. Utilize the MyPlate visual guide to create well-balanced meals for your family. For an idea of how many calories your child should consume (though we do not recommend calorie counting) please see the table below.

Recommended Daily Calories

Gender	Age (Years)	Sedentary	Moderately Active	Active
Female	4-8	1200-1400	1400-1600	1400-1800
	9-13	1400-1600	1600-2000	1800-2200
Male	4-8	1200-1400	1400-1600	1600-2000
	9-13	1600-2000	1800-2200	2000-2600

Sedentary means a lifestyle that includes only the light physical activity associated with typical day-to-day life.

Moderately active means a lifestyle that includes physical activity equivalent to walking about 1.5 to 3 miles per day at 3 to 4 miles per hour, in addition to the light physical activity associated with typical day-to-day life.

Active means a lifestyle that includes physical activity equivalent to walking more than 3 miles per day at 3 to 4 miles per hour, in addition to the light physical activity associated with typical day-to-day life.

- **Fad diets may appeal to a child concerned about weight.** Unfortunately popular diets are often unhealthy and not appropriate for children and adolescents. Instead of dieting, parents need to encourage a balanced diet and an active lifestyle as the best approach to weight control. If your child is considering adopting certain eating behaviors (like vegetarianism) or if you would like guidance on how to have a healthier lifestyle for your teen, please talk to your doctor.

Healthy Habit Tips

Remember the message “9-7-5-2-1-0” for what healthy habits are important for your teen.

- **9: Your child needs at least 9 hours of sleep.** (11 and 12 year olds need between 10 to 12 hours). Getting the proper amount of sleep helps with how your child functions during the day and is also vital to maintaining a healthy weight.
- **7: Eat breakfast 7 days a week.** Do not skip breakfast. Lack of time in the morning, not being hungry, and early lunch periods are frequently cited reasons for skipping breakfast. Eating breakfast jump-starts the metabolism, improves school performance, and prevents children from getting too hungry and overeating later in the day – habits that lead to excess weight. Simplify breakfast. Prefill a bowl with cereal or get string cheese and a piece of fruit ready for breakfast the night before.
- **5: Eat at least 5 servings of fruits and vegetables per day.** Use the MyPlate visual guide and make ½ of your plate fruits and vegetables at meals and include fruits and vegetables for snacks. For specific recommendations on the amount of each food group your child should eat per day based on age, sex, and activity level, please visit chooseMyPlate.gov.
- **2: Spend less than 2 hours a day on screen time.** This includes TV, video games, recreational computer time, smart tablets and smart phones. Turn off the TV during meals. Keep the TV and computer out of bedrooms. TV’s in bedrooms contribute to disordered sleep and increase exposure to commercials that result in cravings for unhealthy food.
- **1: Participate in at least 1 hour of physical activity per day.**
- **0: Drink almost no soda, diet soda, sports drinks, and fruit drinks a day.** Even 100% fruit juice contains a large amount of sugar. Water and nonfat (skim) or lowfat (1%) are the best drinks for you.

Fiber

Include fiber (which comes from fruit, vegetables, whole grains, legumes (beans), and nuts) in your and your child’s diet. There are many health benefits of fiber including helping lower cholesterol and helping keep you feeling fuller longer. **It is recommended that children get “Age+ 5” grams of fiber per day.** For example, an 11 year old child needs “11 + 5” or 16 grams of fiber per day.

Bone Health

- Almost ½ of a person’s bone mass is accumulated between 11 and 19 years of age. If bones are not developed well during these years, catch-up later in life is not possible. If your child does not consume enough calcium at this age, he will be at risk for osteoporosis (weak bones) as an adult and may even be at a higher risk for fractures now.
- **The recommended daily intake of calcium for children 9 to 18 years old is 1300 mg.** Most children currently only get 400-800 mg of calcium daily, with girls consuming the least. Milk and milk products are the best source of calcium. Calcium in green leafy vegetables is poorly absorbed. If your child does not consume enough calcium consider giving her a calcium supplement. If you are giving your child more than 500 mg of calcium a day, split the dose. More than 500 mg of calcium supplement at a time is not well absorbed by the body.

Development

Physical Growth

- In the year of greatest growth a boy will gain up to four or five inches in height. By the time his growth spurt is over, he’ll have grown about eight inches or more in height.
- The average height gain in females during their peak year is a bit more than three inches. After menstruation begins, the growth rate for girls slows down, and most girls stop growing in height about 2 years after their first period.

Puberty and Sexual Development

There is a wide range of normal for the onset of puberty.

- Boys tend to start puberty later than girls. Most boys have first signs of puberty somewhere between 10 and 12 years. For boys, delayed puberty is defined as having no sign of puberty by age 13.
- Breast development for most girls begins between 9 and 11 years. The first menstrual period usually occurs about 2 years at the beginning of breast development. Delayed puberty for a girl is defined as no breast development by age 13 or no menstrual period by age 16. Discuss your concerns with your child’s physician.
- Your emerging teen will have questions about changes to his body but may be embarrassed to discuss them with you. It is helpful to bring up the subject of puberty and discuss changes in an open and frank manner. Using books and other materials may be helpful.
- Discuss issues of sexuality with your child in an open and honest manner. Handling peer pressure, sexually transmitted diseases, birth control, and AIDS transmission are all areas that your teen needs information. Let your child know your values, and identify possible misinformation. Keep the lines of communication open. Discuss issues of sexuality with your child in an ongoing and open manner.

School

Middle school is an important transition period. Your teenager will be expected to take more responsibility for his own work, demonstrate maturing organizational skills and be challenged by a variety of subjects. Continue to be involved in your teenager's education. Meet the teachers and find out their expectations for your child's work and classroom behavior.

Peer Relationships

Your teenager's relationships with his peers will be very important over the next few years. Your child needs friends to test his ideas, actions, and roles. Although your teenager will be selecting friends from a variety of people (some you will like and some you won't), these choices are an important part of his development. **If your teen's friends start experimenting with alcohol, drugs or smoking, increase your attention.** These friendships place your teen at higher risk for these behaviors. Your support and guidance can be invaluable.

Emotional Development

- The teenage years are a complex, challenging time for your teen as well as for the rest of your family. Your teenager is making an important transition from being a child to being an adult. He is becoming more independent and learning to look at the world in new ways, comparing his ideas and values with those of others.
- He may question things including your household rules, your beliefs, and your authority. This is normal and part of the maturing process, but keep in mind it's your responsibility to set appropriate limits. As they pass into middle adolescence, they are more likely to just ignore you - spending more time with peers and even experimenting with new ideas. This can be a frightening time for a parent, especially if your teen starts experimenting with sex, alcohol or drugs. As your teenager is changing, changes in the family will also occur. However, even during the most stressful times, remember these basic ideas:
 - Continue to listen to each other, even if you are on different sides of the fence.
 - Don't confuse the thing you are unhappy about with the person who is doing it. Keep your anger focused on the actions, not directed at your child.
 - Avoid constant criticism. Pick the important battles, and let the unimportant ones take care of themselves.
 - Show interest in what he is doing. When there are disagreements, try to find a common ground or area of compromise. If nothing else, agree to disagree and be clear about where each of you stands and why.
 - Don't preach and don't nag. Try to keep your conversations rational and respectful of your teenager's feelings.
- If you feel you have lost control because your teenager's behavior is so impulsive, anti-social, or self-destructive, seek help. A referral to an experienced counselor can be very helpful. Getting help for your family by using a family counselor, psychologist, or psychiatrist is not a sign that you've failed as a parent. This shows a positive approach to improving a negative situation. If you are not comfortable with a particular professional, discuss this with your child's physician, and ask for a referral to another person. You need a therapist who can work best with your family, your teenager, and the specific problems you may be having.
- The good news is that by late adolescence most teenagers will feel much more comfortable spending time with you. If you've treated him fairly and consistently, if you've given him room to grow, and if you've continued to love him, he'll enter adulthood with a strong, healthy attitude.

Safety

- **Alcohol & Drugs.** Illegal drugs are more dangerous and more easily accessible than ever before. They will have to decide for themselves, whether to join in or not. Although parents can't make the decision for them, parents need to make sure they know in advance the dangers of experimenting with mood-altering drugs. It's important for you to get involved before a drug problem develops:
 - Talk with him frequently about subjects relevant to his life, including drugs and how they play a role in his relationships to his peers. Give him the facts about the danger of drugs. Teach him to make independent judgements, no matter what his friends are doing or saying. And let him know how you feel about drugs.
 - Remind him there are other ways to handle his feelings or problems without drugs. Most of all let him know you'll always be there to help with his problems.
 - Build his self-esteem, praise his accomplishments.
 - Encourage him to participate in enjoyable activities which could help him from using drugs out of boredom.
 - Let your teenager know that if he uses drugs, you'll take away valued privileges.
 - Make sure your teenager knows the legal consequences of taking drugs.

- Set a good example by limiting your own use of alcohol and medications. Never drink under unsafe conditions (such as when driving) or make light of excessive drinking.
- If you discover your teenager is abusing drugs or alcohol, early counseling and/or treatment is vital. Ask your child’s physician for guidance.
- **Smoking.** The use of cigarettes and smokeless tobacco is common even in younger teenagers. Teenagers may know about the risks of tobacco but may not realize how addictive smoking can be. Share that smoking is responsible for 1 in 5 deaths in the US. If you smoke, show your teenager that quitting is a good idea. Children of smokers are more likely to smoke.
- **Car Safety.** Children should ride in the rear of a vehicle until they are 13 years old. Don’t start the car until everyone is buckled in safely. Set a good example for your teenager by always wearing your seat belt and teaching your pre-driver good driving habits.
- **Bike, Skate, and Skateboard Safety.** Be sure your teenager follows bicycle safety rules. Bicycle helmets should be worn every time your child rides a bike. Helmets are also recommended with in-line roller skates and skateboards. Teach your adolescent road safety. Ride on the right side of the street; signal for turns; wear reflective gear and use lights if riding after dark.
- **Fire Safety.** Change smoke detector batteries at least twice a year on dates you’ll remember, like Day Light Savings and Standard Time change date. Do not smoke or allow smoking in your home.
- **Gun Safety.** It is best to keep guns out of your home. If your family chooses to keep a gun, store it unloaded in a locked place, separate from the ammunition. Children in a home where guns are present are more likely to be shot by themselves, their friends, or family members than an intruder. Handguns are especially dangerous. Teach your teenager to leave a house or situation immediately if they see a gun.

Electronics and Media in Your Home

- **Video Games/ the Internet.** Studies of interactive media indicate that the effect of interactive “virtual violence” may be more harmful than passive media, like television. Studies show that after playing violent video games, young people show a decrease in helpful behaviors and an increase in violent behavior when provoked. Video games are an ideal environment in which to learn violence and in some people, can be addicting.
 - Parents need to monitor and help their children with media choices. Sports and non-violent strategic video games are preferable to games that glamorize carrying and using weapons.
- **The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) wants all parents to be aware that television viewing can contribute to:**
 - Violent and aggressive behavior
 - Obesity
 - Poor body concept and self- image
 - Substance abuse
 - Early sexual behavior

Monitor the shows that your child watches. Most programs should be informational, educational, and non-violent. View television with your child. Encourage alternative entertainment for your child, such as reading, athletics, or other forms of exercise.

Reading Suggestions and Resources

- **Caring for Your School-Age Child: Ages 5 to 12,** The American Academy of Pediatrics.
- **Caring for Your Teenager,** The American Academy of Pediatrics
- **www.healthychildren.org,** Parenting website developed by the AAP
- **www.choosemyplate.gov,** Nutrition website