

Nutrition Fact Sheet

The importance of nutrition is frequently neglected in the United States, even though dietary patterns have been linked to obesity, heart disease, high blood pressure, type II diabetes, problems breathing, sleeping disorders, osteoporosis, and some cancers. Eating nutrient dense foods and modifying the intake of sugars, saturated fats, trans-fats, cholesterol, and sodium is important for reducing the likelihood of obesity and disease. Although diseases related to nutritional deficiencies have decreased over the last few decades, poor food choices and over-eating, have led to dramatic increases in rates of overweight and obesity in the U.S. As one example, between two thirds and three quarters of children exceed the daily recommendations for saturated fat intake. As a result of poor eating habits (for example, eating too many calories, too much fat, too much sugar, and too many snacks) and low levels of physical activity, currently, over 15% of children and adolescents between (6 to 19) are estimated to be overweight in the United States.

KidsHealth recommends five strategies for parents to improve their child's or adolescent's nutrition and to encourage the development of healthy eating habits:

- 1) have regular family meals
- 2) serve a variety of healthy foods and snacks
- 3) be a role model by eating health yourself
- 4) avoid battles over food
- 5) involve children in the process of making good nutrition choices.

Changing eating habits is complex process. The number one reason people chose one certain food over another is taste. Other important predictors of food choice are time, cultural/societal influences, media/marketing, attitudes/beliefs, and monetary cost. One should keep these factors in mind when attempting to change personal or familial eating habits.

Children and Young Adolescents Daily Caloric Intake

To maintain growth and development, male children and young adolescents between the ages of 9 and 13 should eat 1,800 calories per day if they are sedentary, 1,800 to 2,200 calories if they are moderately active, and 2,000 to 2,600 if they are very active. Female children and young adolescents between the ages of 9 and 13 should eat 1,600 calories per day if they are sedentary, 1,600 to 2,000 calories if they are moderately active, and 1,800 to 2,200 if they are very active.

Balancing the Nutrition of Children and Young Adolescents

People from the ages of 4 through 18 should ensure that their fat intake is about 25% to 35% of their daily caloric intake. Most of these fats should be polyunsaturated or monounsaturated fats (for example: fats from fish, nuts, and some vegetable oils) and not from saturated or trans fats (for example: fats from meet, cheese, or hydrogenated oils—like fats in many cookies, crackers and cakes). At least half of the grains that children and adolescents consume should be whole

grains. Children who are nine years of age and older should consume at least 3 cups of milk or a milk equivalent products every day. In addition, children and adolescents need to make sure they have an adequate intake of calcium, potassium, fiber, magnesium, and vitamin E. Children and adolescents should eat a variety of fruits and vegetables each day and should eat at least 5 servings of fruits or vegetables each day (2 ½ cups).

Children and Adolescence and Diets for Losing Weight

It is important to consult a health care provider before putting a child or adolescent on a weight-loss diet. Children and adolescents who need to manage their weight still need to have an adequate intake of nutrients in order to ensure proper growth and development. Like adults, most children will respond to physical activity as a weight management tool.

What Can Teachers and School Administrators Do?

Teachers and school administrators could advocate for healthier food options to be served in school cafeterias, snack bars, and vending machines, as well as teach children and young adolescents how to make healthy food choices. Avoid exclusive contracts between the school and soft drink or fast food companies. Make comprehensive nutrition education part of the school's curriculum. In addition, be careful of using unhealthy snacks for rewards or depriving children of physical activity for punishment.

What Can Parents Do?

Parents are often important gatekeepers for child and adolescent nutrition. Parents should try to learn how to eat healthy and act as role models for their children and young adolescents. In addition, parents typically purchase the majority of the food that children and young adolescents eat. By moderating the amount and types of food in a child or young adolescents home, a parent has a lot of control over the foods accessible and available to children and young adolescents on a daily basis. Further, parents can teach children how to choose and prepare balanced meals.

Resources

Tailors health information to parents, kids, and teens: www.KidsHealth.org

Support for child nutrition programs: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/>

Food and nutrition information center: <http://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/>

Healthy school meals: <http://schoolmeals.nal.usda.gov/>

Links to family nutrition websites: <http://navigator.tufts.edu/family/>

An A to Z guide to various nutrition topics: <http://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/etext/fnic.html>