

Ways Parents Can Prevent Childhood Obesity

(StatePoint) With nearly one-third of children overweight or obese, childhood obesity has become an epidemic. Fortunately, it's also treatable and preventable.

"Parents want their children to be healthy, but given the mixed messages about food and weight in our culture, they're unsure how to address the problem. However, there is a great deal families can do to support each other in eating well and staying fit," says Dr. Sandra Hassink, chair of the Obesity Leadership Work Group at the American Academy of Pediatrics.

Be a Role Model

Children do as they see, not as you say. It's important to evaluate your own healthy living before trying to instill the right habits in your kids. Assess your own diet by looking at what's in the fridge and what snacks you keep on hand. While serving size and calorie count may vary, both children and adults should be eating five servings of fruits and vegetables every day.

Also, take the time to exercise. Doing so will give your kids a roadmap for adulthood as they begin to see exercise as a fun part of daily family life. If a child is already overweight, involve the whole family in a fitness routine rather than singling out one child. After all, everyone needs an hour of physical activity a day, regardless of size or weight.

Tune Out

How much screen time do you and your children get? Sedentary lifestyles, driven by increasing amounts of time in front of TV sets or computers, are a major contributor to obesity.

"Children should get no more than one to two hours of screen time a day, not counting what they need to complete schoolwork," says Dr. Hassink.

Don't place a television in your child's room. If television serves as background noise in your home, instead try turning on the radio when you come home. Music may lead to dancing, and talk radio fills the quiet



Get children involved in preparing healthful meals.

as you and the kids do chores.

Think Big Picture

You are not alone in trying to curb the obesity epidemic, and using the professionals and resources at your disposal can help. Talk to your pediatrician about your child's nutrition and activity level. Pediatricians can also measure the Body Mass Index of your child to help you gain a better understanding of your child's health.

Parents can also work with schools and community groups to provide healthy options. Encourage teachers to schedule time for daily physical activity. With the support of other parents, ask school officials to remove soda machines and unhealthy snacks. Also make sure all water fountains are working and sanitary.

For more ideas on how to prevent childhood obesity and keep your family fit, visit HealthyChildren.org.

"Being healthy is about consistently making decisions that are in your family's best interest," says Dr. Hassink. "Be positive and proactive, and don't get discouraged if you or your child has a setback. Keep your eye on the end goal of creating a healthier lifestyle for your family."