

WEIGHT MANAGEMENT FOR CHILDREN

The overweight child presents a challenge in day-to-day management. An unhealthy weight can put a child at risk for high cholesterol, high blood pressure, heart disease, type 2 diabetes and depression. A child's weight is affected by three factors, diet, exercise and genetics. Parents may be frustrated by the observation that their overweight child seems to eat about the same amount as a thinner sibling or friend. Each child is different in metabolism and intervention must take into account the child's specific circumstances.

Below are a few points, which may be applied to children in general.

- Overweight problems are very rarely related to glandular diseases, especially if the child is tall and generally healthy.
- Very low caloric diets or plans are not safe for children since brain and organ development can be impaired.
- 1 hour or more of moderate to vigorous physical activity each day is recommended. This can be done in shorter periods throughout the day. It doesn't need to be an organized sport; dance to favorite music, use a workout video, visit a playground, take a walk, ride a bicycle, go to the gym.
- Limit screen time to 2 hours or less a day (this does not include school work). Screen time includes TV, computers, video games, DVDs and cell phones. Decreasing TV time helps avoid commercials that often entice children to request unhealthy food. Remove the TV from the bedroom. DON'T eat in front of the TV.
- Do not single out the overweight child. It is better to make healthier goals for your whole family.
- Mildly overweight children may simply need to stop gaining for a while as they grow in height. Moderately or severely overweight children may lose about a pound a week without compromising growth.

Features of the diet worth reviewing are:

1. Assess what the child drinks. Juice and soda have large amounts of calories. Milk is necessary for protein and calcium, but excess amounts can calorie overload the child. Consider the following goals:
 - Juice – 4-8 ounces maximum per day of 100% fruit juice. (No punches or fruit drinks with added sugar).
 - Soda – none or small amounts of diet soda.
 - Skim milk – 24 ounces per day maximum.
 - Drinks such as lemonade or ice tea should be unsweetened and contain no caffeine. Avoid sports drinks. Water is the best choice, drinking 3 to 6 glasses of water daily is a good idea
2. Schedule meals at regular times. A school age child should eat four times daily, breakfast, lunch, snack, and dinner. In general, Snacks should be food for energy, not a "treat." Eat as a family whenever possible. Eat at home as much as possible.

3. Limit “junk food” treats to one a day or less. Take the recommended serving size from the package and put the rest away. This way, for example, your child eats 2 cookies instead of 5. To expect a child to totally avoid sweets is unreasonable and unfair.
4. Reduce fat whenever possible. Fat has more than twice the calories as the same amount of protein or starch. Choose low fat or fat free substitutes for products such as salad dressings or crackers. Do not add fat to foods; instead choose a low fat preparation style. For example, baked potatoes are a much better choice than French fries. Do not add large amounts of butter or sour cream to the baked potato. Broil or bake instead of frying. Use turkey instead of salami or bologna and select low fat cheese.
5. Emphasize fruits and vegetables; at least 5 servings a day. Include one green leafy or yellow vegetable for vitamin A such as spinach, broccoli, squash, greens or carrots and one vitamin C-rich fruit, vegetable, or 100% fruit juice such as citrus juices, an orange, a grapefruit, strawberries, melon, or tomato.
6. To estimate how many calories your child should eat each day, use the attached chart ***Daily calorie needs based on age, gender and activity level.***
7. After finding out how many calories your child needs use the attached chart ***Daily amounts of each food group based on calorie needs*** to plan on how much food from each food group to serve daily. Your child’s energy needs may vary from day to day. It’s not necessary for him to eat the exact amounts from each food group every day, rather it should average out over 1-2 weeks. Make up your child’s plate to control serving size. If seconds are requested, tell your child to wait a few minutes to be sure he or she is really still hungry. Splitting portions and offering “seconds” can help slow down a rapid eater.

Consider a visit with a registered dietician to discuss your family’s particular needs. A dietician experienced with children’s nutrition is a good choice.

Hunterdon Pediatrics offers individual weight management visits with our pediatric nurse practitioners. Initial visits include history and medical assessment. Follow-up visits include goal setting and problem solving.

Hunterdon Medical Center’s Community Nutrition Department offers the “Weigh to Go” program. It is a 4 week nutrition and exercise program held at the Deer Path YMCA in Readington. To enroll your child call: 908-237-6920. There is a fee for this program.

Do not hesitate to speak to your child’s doctor or nurse practitioner if you have concerns about your child’s weight. Medical screening such as cholesterol and blood pressure are especially important for the overweight child. At Hunterdon Pediatric Associates, we will gladly work with you to make your child as healthy as he or she can be.

Daily amounts of each food group based on calorie needs

Food Group ^a	1,000 Calories	1,200 Calories	1,400 Calories	1,600 Calories	1,800 Calories	2,000 Calories
Fruits	1 cup	1 cup	1 ½ cups	1 ½ cups	1 ½ cups	2 cups
Vegetables	1 cup	1 ½ cups	1 ½ cups	2 cups	2 ½ cups	2 ½ cups
Grains	3 ounces	4 ounces	5 ounces	5 ounces	6 ounces	6 ounces
Protein foods	2 ounces	3 ounces	4 ounces	5 ounces	5 ounces	5 ½ ounces
Dairy	2 cups	2 ½ cups	2 ½ cups	3 cups	3 cups	3 cups

Food Group ^a	2,200 Calories	2,400 Calories	2,600 Calories	2,800 Calories	3,000 Calories	3,200 Calories
Fruits	2 cups	2 cups	2 cups	2 ½ cups	2 ½ cups	2 ½ cups
Vegetables	3 cups	3 cups	3 ½ cups	3 ½ cups	4 cups	4 cups
Grains	7 ounces	8 ounces	9 ounces	10 ounces	10 ounces	10 ounces
Protein foods	6 ounces	6 ½ ounces	6 ½ ounces	7 ounces	7 ounces	7 ounces
Dairy	3 cups					

^a Food group equivalents: 1 cup of fruit equals 1 cup of raw or cooked fruit, ½ cup of dried fruit, or 1 cup of 100% fruit juice; 1 cup of vegetables equals 1 cup of raw or cooked vegetables, 2 cups of leafy salad greens, or 1 cup of 100% vegetable juice; 1 ounce of grains equals 1 slice of bread, 1 ounce of ready-to-eat cereal, or ½ cup of cooked rice, pasta or cereal; 1 ounce of protein such as lean meat, poultry, or seafood equals 1 egg, 1 tablespoon of peanut butter, ¼ cup of cooked beans or peas, or ½ ounce of nuts or seeds; 1 cup of dairy such as milk, yogurt, or fortified soy beverage equals 1 ½ ounces of natural cheese or 2 ounces of processed cheese.

Adapted from US Department of Agriculture and US Department of Health and Human Services. *Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2010*. 7th ed. Washington, DC; US Government Printing Office 2010.
<http://www.health.gov/dietaryguidelines/2010.asp>. Accessed March 10, 2014