


May's Healthy Eating Tip for the Month: Addressing Childhood Obesity



Childhood obesity has become the most common chronic disease affecting children and continues to grow in number. Today, an estimated 16% of children aged 6-19 are overweight or obese, and an additional 15% are considered at risk for becoming overweight. This is a number that has tripled since 1980. Although overweight and obesity are often thought of as cosmetic problems, overweight children are also at an increased risk for diabetes, hypertension, and other co-morbid conditions.

Although there is not one specific cause of childhood obesity, there are several factors that are linked to the disease. Associated causes include:

- Environmental factors
- Lack of physical activity
- Sedentary lifestyle
- Genetic make-up/family history
- Socioeconomic status
- Dietary patterns



**Encourage your family
to get out and play this
May and combat
childhood obesity!**

Combating childhood overweight and obesity begins with an investigation into what is causing acceleration in weight gain. By examining each possible cause, changes can be made that are tailored to an individual child's lifestyle.

Environmental Factors:

In today's fast-paced environment, eating has become something of convenience and a task that needs to be accomplished, not necessarily taken time to enjoy. The amount of fast food and food eaten outside the home has increased dramatically in the past few decades. Studies show that those who eat more fast food and meals away from home are at increased risk of overweight and obesity. This is largely due to the increase in portion sizes and the fact that people tend to

eat larger quantities of food and more calories when eating out. Additional environmental factors leading to obesity include:

- Increased soda availability and consumption
- School ala carte lines, vending machines, candy sales, and pop machines
- Lack of physical education classes at school
- Unsafe walking conditions in cities
- Increased technology and time spent watching television
- Driving instead of walking or biking
- Increased convenience foods

TIPS!

Ways to create a healthier environment include:

- ✓ Making changes as a family: Plan family meals that are nutritious and enjoyable for children
- ✓ Pack school lunches ahead of time to avoid buying lunch
- ✓ Cut up fresh fruits and vegetables for easy snacking
- ✓ Avoid keeping high-fat, high calorie snack foods in the house
- ✓ Limit pop and juice consumption
- ✓ Plan ahead of time: Make a healthy menu for the week and write grocery lists before heading to the store

Physical Activity

With an increase in technology, there has been a decrease in physical activity. Time spent watching television, playing video games, and using the computer has increased dramatically amongst children. Not only that, but schools have also cut the number of days students attend gym class and have cut recess time, contributing further to the sedentary lifestyle. Physical activity is an important preventative and curative measure for childhood obesity. The US Surgeon General recommends that children participate in at least 60 minutes of physical activity daily.

TIPS!

Ways to increase a child's physical activity level include:

- ✓ Planning family walks and trips to the park
- ✓ Engaging a child in after school sports
- ✓ Setting limits on the amount of time spent watching television, playing video games, and using the computer.

- ✓ Encouraging a child to play outside
- ✓ Signing up for martial arts, gymnastics, or dance classes

The Parent's Role

A parent's role in feeding their child can often become a confusing task. When addressing a child's weight, a parent should be supportive and understanding. A child self esteem is largely based upon their parent's feelings about them, so special care should be taken when considering a child's weight.

TIPS!

Ways parents should be involved in a child achieving a healthy weight include:

- ✓ Deciding what, where, and when a child will eat and allowing the child to decide if, and how much they will eat
- ✓ Be supportive of a child's concerns about their weight
- ✓ Never single one child out because of their weight
- ✓ Involve children in meal planning and preparation
- ✓ Demonstrate healthy eating habits

What is the research telling us?

In the past few years, many studies have been focusing on the environmental factors that contribute to childhood obesity. By discovering what environmental issues are the biggest contributors to the obesity epidemic, we may be able to make changes to stop weight gain. Below is a brief summary of a few studies that investigated childhood obesity. For information on the entire article, refer to the sources at the end of this web page.

- One study focused on weight gain, fast food, and physical activity amongst children. The research focused on the impact of environmental vs. genetic factors on body mass index. In this study, siblings living in the same household, and also those living in separate households, were followed from adolescence into adulthood and reported physical activity, sedentary behavior, and diet. Results of the study found that those living together had greater similarities in physical activity, fast food intake, and body mass index than those living apart. This study showed the impact

- that environment plays on obesity and related behaviors. It also showed that environment may be more influential than genetic factors in determining body weight because siblings living apart were less likely to have similar body mass indexes than those living together.
- Another research study from the Nutrition Journal focused on specific behaviors patterns in children. This study followed 598 children aged 6-16 years and examined physical activity, sleep duration, sedentary habits, and eating behaviors. The aim of the research was to see if these behaviors had an effect on being overweight. Results from this study found that decreased duration of sleep and increased time watching television were significantly associated with being overweight. Results also found that increased consumption of fried foods was associated with being overweight. This study once again enforces the thought that environmental factors have a significant role in weight gain. It suggests that making sure a child gets enough sleep and physical activity can decrease the likelihood that they will be overweight. Also, the study emphasizes the importance of a healthy diet in achieving a healthy weight.
 - One more study on childhood obesity sought to examine the prevalence of and risk factors associated with being overweight. This study surveyed fifth grade students and parents on dietary habits, physical activity, income, and parental and school associated risk factors. Overall, the study surveyed over 4,000 students and parents. Results estimated that 32.9% of students were overweight and 9.9% were obese. Also, it found that those who bought lunch at school were at an increased risk for being overweight. Another interesting result found that children that ate dinner with their family three or more times a week were at decreased risk of being overweight. Furthermore, students that were involved in physical education classes two or more times per week at school were at a decreased risk of being overweight. Findings from this study reinforce the importance of family involvement in achieving a healthy weight and lifestyle. Results also suggest that schools play a vital role in fighting childhood obesity since lack of physical education classes and buying school lunch were associated with children being overweight.

Recipes and Healthy Snack Ideas for Children:

Almond Crusted Chicken Fingers

Chicken fingers often are in a heavy coating and fried. This recipe provides a healthier alternative to the traditionally high-fat, high-calorie dish.

Makes 4 servings

ACTIVE TIME: 20 minutes

TOTAL TIME: 40 minutes

Canola oil cooking spray
1/2 cup sliced almonds
1/4 cup whole-wheat flour
1 1/2 teaspoons paprika
1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
1/2 teaspoon dry mustard
1/4 teaspoon salt
1/8 teaspoon freshly ground pepper
1 1/2 teaspoons extra-virgin olive oil
4 egg whites (see Ingredient note)
1 pound chicken tenders



1. Preheat oven to 475°F. Set a wire rack on a foil-lined baking sheet and coat with cooking spray.
2. Place almonds, flour, paprika, garlic powder, dry mustard, salt and pepper in a food processor; process until the almonds are finely chopped and the paprika is mixed throughout, about 1 minute. With the motor running, drizzle in oil; process until combined. Transfer the mixture to a shallow dish.
3. Whisk egg whites in a second shallow dish. Add chicken tenders and turn to coat. Transfer each tender to the almond mixture; turn to coat evenly. (Discard any remaining egg white and almond mixture.) Place the tenders on the prepared rack and coat with cooking spray; turn and spray the other side.
4. Bake the chicken fingers until golden brown, crispy and no longer pink in the center, 20 to 25 minutes.

NUTRITION INFORMATION: Per serving: 175 calories; 4 g fat (1 g sat, 3 g mono); 65 mg cholesterol; 4 g carbohydrate; 27 g protein; 1 g fiber; 254 mg sodium; 79 mg potassium.

No-Bake Macaroni and Cheese

This healthy twist on a classic favorite provides a high fiber, high calcium, and low cholesterol dish that kids will love to eat. Also, try substituting cheese with a 2% lower fat version to further decrease the fat and calories in this dish.

Makes 4 servings, 1 1/4 cups each

ACTIVE TIME: 20 minutes

TOTAL TIME: 25 minutes

8 ounces whole-wheat elbow noodles (2 cups)
1 10-ounce package frozen chopped broccoli
1 3/4 cups low-fat milk, divided
3 tablespoons flour
1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon ground white pepper
3/4 cup shredded extra-sharp Cheddar cheese
1/4 cup shredded Parmesan cheese
1 teaspoon Dijon mustard



1. Bring a large pot of water to a boil. Cook pasta for 4 minutes. Add frozen broccoli and continue cooking, stirring occasionally, until the pasta and broccoli are just tender, 4 to 5 minutes more.
2. Meanwhile, heat 1 1/2 cups milk in another large pot over medium-high heat until just simmering. Whisk the remaining 1/4 cup milk, flour, garlic powder, salt and pepper in a small bowl until combined. Add the flour mixture to the simmering milk; return to a simmer and cook, whisking constantly, until the mixture is thickened, 2 to 3 minutes. Remove from the heat and whisk in Cheddar, Parmesan and mustard until the cheese is melted.
3. Drain the pasta and broccoli and add to the cheese sauce. Return to the heat and cook, stirring, over medium-low heat, until heated through, about 1 minute.

NUTRITION INFORMATION: Per serving: 412 calories; 13 g fat (7 g sat, 1 g mono); 37 mg cholesterol; 56 g carbohydrate; 22 g protein; 7 g fiber; 640 mg sodium; 236 mg potassium. Nutrition bonus: Vitamin C (70% daily value), Calcium (40% dv), Fiber (27% dv), Vitamin A (25% dv), Magnesium (16% dv).
3 Carbohydrate Servings

*Recipes retrieved from "Eatingwell.com"

Healthy Snack Ideas

➤ **Create your own trail mix**

- Let your child create their own trail mix from whole grain cereal, pretzels, nuts, dried fruit, and granola. Limit servings to 1/2-3/4 cups. Nuts are a great source of healthy fats, cereal and granola provide whole grains, and dried fruits are a great source of vitamins.

➤ **Fruit and yogurt parfait**

- Combine 1 cup low-fat yogurt with 1/2 cup of your child's favorite cut up fruit. Top with 1/4 cup low-fat granola for a healthy snack or dessert. Yogurt is an excellent source of calcium and using half a cup of fruit will provide one serving.



➤ **Mini Pizzas**

- Split a whole wheat English muffin and place on a baking sheet. Top with pizza sauce, low-fat mozzarella, and your child's favorite low-fat toppings including ham, chicken, and veggies. Bake in a 375 degree oven until cheese is melted. The English muffin provides whole grains, cheese provides calcium, and toppings increase vegetable consumption

➤ **Fruit Dip**

- Combine one six ounce container of your child's favorite low-fat yogurt with one container of low-fat cool whip. Mix well and serve as a dip with fresh cut fruit.



- **Other healthy snacks** include cut vegetables with low-fat ranch dressing, low-fat cheese with wheat crackers, low-fat animal crackers or graham crackers with milk, low-fat or unbuttered popcorn



What's in the News?

I've heard a lot about childhood obesity being linked to what a mother eats during pregnancy, is this true?

- ❖ There has been more and more media covering the link between eating during pregnancy and weight later in life. It is true that certain conditions such as uncontrolled gestational diabetes can lead to an overweight baby. Following a healthy diet during pregnancy is very important to having a healthy baby. Healthy eating habits begin very early in life and often mirror our parent's habits. Therefore, beginning healthy habits during pregnancy and the early stages of life can affect a child later in life. Remember to always follow your doctors and registered dietitians guidelines when planning a healthy diet during pregnancy.

There seems to be a lot of media coverage the school's foodservice, is anything being done to change the school environment?

- ❖ Many schools are beginning to take notice to the increasing number of overweight children. Studies suggest that things like school lunch and physical education classes can play a big part in the battle against childhood obesity. Currently, some schools are beginning to remove pop machines and replace them with milk or water machines. Other actions being taken include changing items in the ala carte line to include things like low-fat chips and more fruit. Furthermore, many schools are looking for other fundraising ideas besides candy sales to boost club and sports funds without boosting children's weight. However, not all schools are making these changes. Become involved in your child's school to promote healthy changes and assure action is being taken in the fight against childhood obesity.

What's all the talk about Omega-3 fatty acids?

- ❖ Omega-3 fatty acids are unsaturated fats found in fish, flax, eggs, and various other dietary sources. They are a nutritionally essential fat that is very important to growing children. This is because the essential fat, DHA, and other fatty acids are vital to

guarantee correct eye and brain development. Studies have also shown that these fats support long term heart health. Furthermore, Omega-3 fatty acids are important during pregnancy for proper brain development in the fetus. You might see a lot of commercials now for infant formulas being fortified with DHA and EPA because the research has shown the importance of these fats in development.



Healthy Eating Tip
of the Month Contest!

Don't forget to stop by the display in the U of M main hospital cafeteria to pick up additional brochures and information on childhood obesity.

While you are there, enter your name in a drawing for a chance to win an outdoor Badminton set.

Find more information on childhood obesity and nutrition at the following websites:

- **Obesity Action Coalition:**
www.obesityaction.org
- **Information on the Food Guide Pyramid:**
www.mypyramid.gov
- **The American Dietetic Association:**
www.eatright.org
- **Mayo-Clinic:**
www.mayoclinic.com/health/childhood-obesity/
- **Childhood eating expert Ellyn Satter:**
www.ellynsatter.com
- **Kids Health for Parents:**
<http://kidshealth.org>
- **Healthy Recipe Ideas:**
<http://eatingwell.com>

Sources

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