



# Helping Your Child Reach a Healthy Weight

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Have you ever considered putting your child on a diet? You're not the only parent to wonder if dieting is healthy for children. There has been a steady international rise in obese youngsters over the previous two decades. Early childhood obesity has both acute and long-term health consequences. It is the responsibility of parents, caretakers, and teachers to assist their children in developing good eating habits and avoiding obesogenic sugary food.

As we learned in the first installment of our [series on kids' weight issues](#), dieting can damage weight loss efforts. Most obese individuals can reduce weight in the short term, but cannot keep it off in the long run. Several interconnected physiological processes in the body work together to maintain the body's current weight. According to research, although calorie intake and expenditure might vary, the body's weight remains remarkably stable at an established position and the goal of achieving a positive weight change is shifting that weight set point in our brain.

## Why Calorie-Restricted Diets are Damaging in the Long Run

However, a steady weight set point for adults tends to be maintained for lengthy periods; this trend is not evident in children. Dr. Jenkinson's book, *Why We Eat (Too Much)*, taught us that our bodies have "set points" that are maintained by our biological "negative feedback" systems, and your body's metabolic rate changes based on many conditions.

### Our Subconscious Weight Control

Just as our body signals our brain that we're dehydrated and our brain makes us want to drink water, our body can signal that our physiological makeup has changed. Our organism maintains its order by automatically correcting deviations from our predefined weight. Our fat cells produce the leptin hormone that sends signals to our hypothalamus about the energy (fat) reserves in our body. The hypothalamus serves a critical role in controlling the amount of our body fat by directly altering our metabolism and appetite. When the hypothalamus senses that enough energy is stored, the metabolic rate increases, and the desire to consume food decreases. When too much fat is lost, the hypothalamus increases our appetite and slows our metabolism.

The smooth work of this unconscious mechanism in our body is exactly the reason why people who diet gain back the weight they lost. Actually, often they also gain extra weight. This happens because the period of low calorie intake makes their brain ratchet up their weight set point to ensure their survival for possible future episodes of what it considers famine. Thus, with every new diet they risk slowly raising their current weight set point, which leads to gaining more weight.



## Studies in Dieting and Restrictive Diet After-affects

Research shows that children who diet gain weight, much like adults: adults who go on calorie-restrictive diets often experience short-term weight loss and long-term weight gain. Other trends show that teens who diet tend to be heavier than non-dieters. When children become adults their capacity to control their food intake is impaired by what appears to be a success throughout childhood.

## Saturated Fats Are Good for You

Cultures that traditionally consume higher-fat diets (think the French, the Inuit people of Greenland, and Maasai tribe in Kenya), including saturated fats, have avoided the obesity and heart disease epidemic that has touched almost all corners of the world. According to Dr. Jenkinson, fat-heavy meals promote satiety or fullness and include unprocessed

foods and a lack of empty carbohydrates, all of which contribute to healthy weight maintenance. For much of the Western world, sponsored studies funded by the processed food industry have perpetuated myths about the dangers of fat.

## The Ratio of Omega-3 and Omega-6 Fatty Acids

A lack of certain lipids, or fats, may be a contributing factor to our obesity and other comorbid diseases, according to new research. Fat plays a critical role in many essential bodily functions. Polyunsaturated fatty acids, known as omega-3 and -6 fatty acids, are not produced by our bodies and are only available to us from certain foods. High levels of omega-6s (while fine in moderation) have slowly increased since the rise of the low-fat diet fad in the 1990s and have been found to hinder the body's ability to effectively utilize omega-3s essential for our health. Omega-6 to omega-3 ratios have also been linked to higher weight-set points in recent studies.

Omega-6 originates in grains, including nuts, and meat of animals fed with grains; hydrogenized vegetable oils – found now in most processed foods – also have a very high content of omega-6. Omega-3 comes from green leaves of plants and can be found in abundance in the meat of grass-fed animals and fish, as well as whole milk dairy products and olive oil. Omega-3-containing foods can't be stored long as they quickly go rancid, therefore you can be sure that any food with a long shelf life has little to no content of omega-3.



## Dwindling Food Cultures

The obesity epidemic is still a relatively new problem in human history. Over the course of several generations, different families from every country fed themselves the same traditional cuisine by sourcing their produce, meats, and foods from local farmers and producers. Westerners' focus on "good" and "bad" food consumption is erasing food culture and wisdom, a culture's natural nutritional supply, bonding practices and socialization, and long-established patterns of local meals. The existence of food culture and wisdom have direct effect on happiness and physical health of entire cultural groups.

Goals towards maintaining a healthy weight and lifestyle should focus on normalizing our hormone fluctuations to lower our weight-set point. We can achieve this through careful consideration of omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acid content in our food, avoiding processed foods, and engaging in regular physical activity. Here are some tips to help you get there:

### Practice and Model Healthy Eating Habits

If you want your child to follow your lead and eat healthfully, you must do the same. Children will inherit your food-related attitudes, beliefs, and actions, whether you're aware of it or not. Studies have shown that children eat more healthfully when parents are

present at dinner. Your children's food choices are influenced by the kind of exposure they receive as a youngster.

Setting boundaries with your child is one of the most essential things you can do for them. This is true for all harmful habits, including overeating. You can't expect your youngster to self-regulate how much they eat because they are still developing. If you make minor adjustments each day, you'll be on your way toward success!

- Keep a supply of fresh fruits and veggies on hand for a nutritious snack.
- If you're looking for protein, go for grass-fed beef, chicken, fish, as well as lentils, and beans, among other plant-based options.
- Remind your family to stay hydrated by having them drink enough water.
- Ensure your children establish good eating habits, limit the availability of processed foods rich in sugar and vegetable oils, as well as sugary drinks. Your children should only be allowed to consume these foods occasionally so that they continue to feel like special treats when they do.
- Watch out for omega-6 to omega-3 balance in your diet. Minimize your family's consumption of artificial unsaturated fats as much as possible. Give preference to butter and olive oil instead.
- Get rid of junk food, drink, and fruit juice needs to be a priority, and concentrate on meals and beverages that contain essential nutrients and vitamins.

Your main goal is to establish a new, healthy, environment for your child. That means a type of diet (without calorie restriction) that normalizes their insulin profile and omega-3 to omega-6 ratio. That also means lower stress, sensible physical activity and quality rest.

### Practice and Model Healthy Lifestyle Habits

Children learn from their parents' behavior and attitudes around healthy eating, just as they do with exercise habits. Encourage your child to join you while you incorporate more physical exercise into your own daily routine.

- Regular physical activity is not only beneficial to children's development, but it also helps them maintain a healthy weight. Daily, frequent, active play is essential for children aged 3 to 5. A daily minimum of 60 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity is recommended for children and adolescents aged 6 to 17. Include any action that raises the heart rate, such as running, cycling, or swimming.
- Limit screen time. Only one to two hours of television per day should be allowed for children ages two and above. According to new research, children who watch less television are less likely to gain weight and engage in greater physical activity. In addition, avoid eating while watching television. Watching a screen while eating can interfere with the signals that our bodies tell us when we are full.

- Make sure everyone in your family gets plenty of sleep, according to their age. Obesity is linked to a lack of sleep, in part because sleep deprivation causes us to eat more and engage in less physical activity.

## Avoid an Inactive Lifestyle

Making physical activity exciting and fun is vital if you want to get your kids to participate in regular exercise. Introducing a wide range of activities to youngsters will help you discover the ones they like the most. Some children like doing a particular activity repeatedly. They enjoy the structure and predictability of practicing the same activity repeatedly.

However, other youngsters will become bored if they are not regularly exposed to various games or physical activities. Let them tell you what they enjoy and what they want to do. There are a variety of activities your youngster may participate in, from bicycling and swimming to team sports like soccer and basketball and strolling with you and your partner. Most children benefit from participating in physical activity with friends or family members.

## Be your Child's Role Model

Model a healthy lifestyle instead of focusing on weight loss and calorie counting with your children. A healthy diet can include various foods, regardless of their caloric value. To help overweight children, the objective is to slow the pace of weight increase while enabling them to grow normally. No one should put their children on a calorie-restricted or ANY diet until they've been checked over by a Registered Dietitian (RD) or other highly qualified professional.

Simple calorie counting doesn't begin to capture the complexities of weight gain and loss. There is no one-size-fits-all solution for any one of us. 80 - 90% of the time, eat to nourish your body (when you feel hungry) and pick wholesome meals. Aim to eat for enjoyment or satisfy a need 10 - 20% of the time. Both adults and children need to strike a good balance between eating to fuel their bodies, eating for enjoyment, and maintaining a healthy weight.

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