
INTRODUCTION

If you are unsure how to help your overweight child, becoming well informed is a good place to start. As a parent or caregiver, having the right information can help a child reach and maintain a healthy weight.

When children gain too much weight, this can increase their risk for:

- diabetes and other diseases, such as cancer, heart disease, high blood pressure, high cholesterol and triglycerides (fats in the blood), and stroke;
- breathing problems like sleep apnea or asthma;
- being obese as adults; and
- developing bone and joint problems.

In addition to these health problems, being overweight can cause emotional pain too. Children who are overweight may be discriminated against, or they may feel isolated.

It's clear there are many risks for children who are overweight. However, it's important to know that the ways that adults lose weight are usually not right for children. Children are growing and developing. Therefore, they have special nutritional needs. A diet that is too limited may keep children from growing and developing as they should.

This booklet is written for parents with overweight children between the ages of 4 and 12 years. It explains what you need to know about your child's nutritional and growth needs, and it shows ways to improve the eating habits of your entire family. By changing the way your whole family eats, it will be easier for your overweight child to maintain healthy eating habits.

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Take the Family Lifestyle Quiz

The Family Lifestyle Quiz will help you find changes you can make in your family environment. Answer “yes,” “no,” or “sometimes” to the following questions:

Do you and your family:	Yes	No	Sometimes
1. Have regularly scheduled mealtimes when you are home?			
2. Eat meals together at least once a day?			
3. Eat planned snacks (instead of just grabbing whatever is around when hungry)?			
4. Give portions sized to each person’s needs?			
5. Plan and prepare meals together once a day?			
6. Eat three meals every day?			
7. Try to make mealtimes pleasant?			
8. Avoid making everyone eat everything on their plate before leaving the table?			
9. Make meals last more than 15 minutes?			
10. Eat only in designated areas of the house?			
11. Avoid using food to punish or reward?			
12. Enjoy physical activities together once or twice a week?			

Scoring the Quiz

Give yourself two points for every “yes” answer. Score one point for every “sometimes” answer. Give zero points for every “no” answer.

If you scored 20 to 24 points, your family is doing a great job in these areas! Read the next section for ways to make your skills stronger.

A score of 13 to 19 is good. But review the questions you answered “no” or “sometimes,” and see what changes you can make. The next section provides helpful information on how to incorporate some of these changes in your home.

If your score is 12 points or fewer, following the suggestions in the next section can really help your child and your entire family.