

# Do's and don'ts of parenting an overweight child

By SUZANNE KENNEDY

According to some studies, as many as one-third of American children are overweight. The best way to determine if your child is one of them is to schedule an appointment with their pediatrician. The doctor can explain the growth chart, point out acceptable percentages, and determine if there are underlying medical issues.

If you find your child's weight isn't healthy, approach the subject lightly and with love: "I really love you and I want you to be healthy." Then discuss ways to be healthier, including exercise and an improved diet. In many cases, the goal should not be to lose weight, but to create healthy habits.

## Finding success

Get the whole family involved. If the whole family doesn't change their habits, one child in it won't either.

Getting at least an hour of exercise per day is the best way to get to

a healthy weight. Overweight kids don't need to do more exercise than slimmer children. They will naturally burn more calories for the same activity. Play games together like tag, bike riding, or catch. If the weather isn't cooperating, consider trying activity-based video games, like Wii. Better yet, do chores together.



Enroll children in after-school sports or other activities. Growing up, I always had to do one sport (like soccer or ballet) and one other activity like scouts or 4-H.

Turn off the TV, computer, phone, and tablet. No more than 1-2 hours a day on a screen.

Make sure your child gets

enough sleep.

Reduce portion sizes, and read packages. Start with smaller amounts of food and let your child ask for more if he or she is still hungry. If your child chooses food from a package, read the nutrition label to see what amount is equal to one serving, and then give them that one serving.

Put healthy foods within easy reach and just stop buying the junk. If you do pick up a bag of chips, split it into snack-sized bags according to the suggested portioning.

Limit fast food to once or twice per month.

Schedule meal and snack times. When a child knows food is coming at a certain time, they're less likely to graze in front of the pantry.

Eat only at the table ... not on the couch or bed.

Be positive and supportive. Reward successes with praises and hugs, not cookies and candy.

Limit juice, soda, and coffee drinks. Instead of soda, offer your child sparkling water with a twist of lime.

Make breakfast a priority. Children who eat breakfast are less likely to be overweight or obese than those who skip the first meal of the day. It's important to focus on healthy choices, though, instead of sugary cereals, donuts, or toaster pastries.

Involve them in meal planning and preparing. Working together with measuring cups and spoons is a great time to teach about portion sizes.



## Nutrition

### What to avoid

Don't try to have a "big talk." If your child comes to you, don't make a big deal about it. Listen and let them guide the conversation.

Don't be the food police. Instead of "Do you really need another piece?" try "Is there room in your stomach for more?" This teaches the child to self-regulate.

Don't ban sweets entirely. Instead, limit the amount of goodies your child eats and introduce fruit-based snacks. Banning items can lead to hoarding food and even eating disorders later on.

Don't make your child finish everything on the plate. Plate the food before you bring it to the table rather than bringing platters of food to the table. Eat slowly.

### Where to go for help

If all this doesn't work, ask your child's doctor about other options. He or she may be able to recommend a plan for healthy eating and physical activity, or refer you to a weight-management specialist, registered dietitian or program. Your local health department also may offer weight-management programs for children and teens or information about where you can enroll in one.

*Suzanne Kennedy is a former middle school teacher who lives in Pendleton with her husband and three children.*



**CAPECO**  
 CAPECO - Main Office  
 721 SE 3rd Suite D • Pendleton  
 541-276-1926  
 CAPECO - Airport Location  
 1605 NW 50th Street • Pendleton  
 541-276-5073

"Assisting people to become independent, healthy and safe."

**We Offer Help With:**

- Housing/ Homeownership
- Employment/ Training Services
- Emergency Services
- Food/ Nutrition
- Senior Services
- Energy Services

