

By encouraging activity, limiting television, and promoting good food choices, parents can help children maintain a healthy weight

A close-up photograph of a young boy with short brown hair, smiling broadly. He is wearing a blue polo shirt and holding a slice of orange in his hand, which is in the foreground. The background is softly blurred, suggesting an outdoor setting.

The *Weight* of Katy's Future

Overcoming Childhood Obesity for a Healthy Life

By Kelly Isenberger

The prevalence of children who are obese or overweight is growing at an alarming rate, and Katy is not immune. Within the last 30 years, obesity rates among children in America have tripled, from 6.5% to 19.6%, according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention. The statistic of one in five kids dealing with the health issues surrounding obesity would be shocking all on its own, but Texas rates are actually 10 points higher. More than 30% of Texas children are obese, according to the Texas Department of Agriculture.

With British chef, Jamie Oliver's TV show, *Food Revolution*, and First Lady Michelle Obama's Let's Move campaign, the nation has begun to take notice, and more efforts are being made to bring awareness and education of childhood obesity to the forefront. While other nations' children suffer from malnutrition, World Relief reports that Americans spend \$30 billion to \$50 billion a year on diets and related expenses to reduce caloric intake. All the while, cardiovascular and obesity rates run out of control. So what exactly is childhood obesity, what can parents do about it, and how can it be prevented in Katy kids?

What is Obesity?

A child's body mass index (BMI) is used to determine whether they are overweight or obese. Determining whether a child is obese or overweight depends on where they fall on the national percentiles of growth for children. Dorothy Schmidt is a registered dietitian at Memorial Hermann Katy Hospital who is trained in childhood and adolescent weight management. "The consequences of obesity may include sleep apnea, hypertension, hypercholesterolemia, gallstones, diabetes mellitus, orthopedic problems, low self esteem, depression, and even decreased academic achievement," she warns, adding, "Being an obese child increases the risk that they will be obese adults." An adult with obesity is at a greater risk of developing certain cancers and heart disease, as well as a shortened life span.

These effects are not at all what parents hope for their children and many parents would agree they don't want their kids to start life facing these issues. They want kids to be successful and healthy and able to realize their dreams and fulfill their potential. As a parent, friend, or community member, it's important to become more aware of the issue and get involved in making a positive change.

Developing Healthy Eating Habits

What can parents do to raise healthy and fit kids? Schmidt advises, "Start with breastfeeding infants, limit eating out, and clean out the pantry." Eating a diet rich in fruits and veggies and whole grains is crucial. "Have regular family meals, learn to read labels, and plan snacks and meals ahead of time, providing healthy snacks, such as yogurt, reduced fat string cheese, fresh fruits, and raw vegetables," Schmidt suggests.

Learn what is in the food you currently eat and start making adjustments. If you don't know what is healthy, visit websites such as eatright.org or letsmove.gov to learn more. The USDA even has a website to look up the nutritional food content of most foods at mypyramid.gov. Just make a decision to learn more about healthy eating and start making changes in your family's diet.

Leading an Active Life

One of the most crucial changes needed is increased activity. Encourage kids to get out and get moving. Pam Filip, associate



It's important for parents to model healthy eating and exercise habits for children

executive director for the Katy YMCA, says, "Parents can take walks, take the kids with them, or they can they can ride their bikes." She explains, "Find something that will encourage them and that the kids want to do. If it's burdensome, they will want to sit and play Xbox." The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that television viewing be limited to no more than two hours per day. Schmidt even suggests, "Assign age-appropriate tasks and encourage children to help with such things as washing the car, gardening, making the beds, vacuuming, and walking the dog." Getting active doesn't have to be regimented for children and it doesn't have to be expensive, either.

Setting a Good Example

Both Filip and Schmidt urge parents to be the role model for healthy living. "The biggest message a parent can send is for a child to see their parent working out and starting their own program," says Filip. Schmidt explains, "For children between 5 and 12 years of age, family is the most important form of social support. Therefore, it is



Obesity in kids can lead to health problems like diabetes, hypertension, and sleep apnea



Going for walks as a family is a great way to exercise together



Plan healthy meals in advance and give children nutritious snacks



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very important for adults to be positive role models for eating, television viewing, and physical activity behaviors.” And, while setting the example, your whole family will reap the benefits of healthy living.

Helping a Child Struggling with Obesity

If you think that your child may be at risk for becoming overweight or obese, don't wait. Call the pediatrician and start making healthy changes right away. Your doctor will determine the need for possible nutritional assessments. There are also a few programs in Katy that can help you.

The Katy Family YMCA has a weight management program for kids ages 9 to 12, called Trim Kids. In the program, the child and parent will meet with a counselor and a nutritionist. They will talk about peer pressure and challenges that they have. They have even taken parents to the grocery store to teach them how to shop. Every meeting they do an activity, all with the goal of helping the children lose weight and teaching them how to make good choices.

“Have regular family meals, learn to read labels, and plan snacks and meals ahead of time, providing healthy snacks, such as yogurt, reduced fat string cheese, fresh fruits, and raw vegetables.”

-Dorothy Schmidt

Another program is called Transitions Lifestyle System for Kids, also known as TLS Kids. Dr. Ronald Bruscia from the Family Foot and Ankle Wellness Center in Katy is a TLS Kids coach. “My goal is to get kids to change the way they think about food, and even get them to start making healthy choices for their own families,” he says. Dr. Bruscia sees kids who come in with foot, ankle, knee, and hip problems because their bodies can't handle their weight.

The program offers a fun and exciting way to learn about healthy living through videos and computer games. It also helps parents to see the need for change. Two programs are offered, including one for kids ages 5 to 10 and another for kids ages 11 to 17.

A Healthy Future for Kids

Studies show that kids do better in school when they eat healthy food and get regular exercise, that eating right at an early age will help develop a healthy brain, and that students with the highest fitness scores also have had the highest test scores. It is clear that healthy and fit kids will have more of a chance of living successful and happy lives. Start making healthful changes now - the future of the nation and the Katy community depends on it. **KM**

KELLY ISENBERGER is a Katy resident and mother of two girls. She strives to set an example of healthy living, but has been known to go through many fast food drive-thrus.

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www.sarahspringer.org

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Healthy Family Habits

Here are some steps to help your children lead a more active, healthy life.

- Eat five fruits and vegetables per day
- Get one hour of physical activity a day
- Limit TV/gaming time to less than two hours a day
- Limit sugar sweetened beverages
- Switch to low-fat dairy products
- Regularly eat family meals together
- Limit fast food, take-out, and eating out
- Prepare foods at home as a family
- Eat a diet rich in calcium
- Eat a high fiber diet

Tips from the American Academy of Pediatrics



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7 Food Tips

1 Sugars

Choose foods low in added sugars

2 Whole Grains

Choose whole-grain foods over processed starches

3 Fruits

Eat fruit with meals and for snacks, going easy on fruit juice

4 Lean & Low Fat

Eat lean or low-fat fish, poultry, and meat

5 Veggies

Eat a variety of dark green and orange vegetables

6 Health Nuts

Fish and nuts are healthy sources of oil, as are corn, soybean, canola and olive oil

7 Calcium

Low-fat milk and milk products are a great way to get calcium



- Adapted from mypyramid.gov

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