



GOOD Bite

at home

A nutrition fact sheet for parents and carers of children 0-5 years

Helping Children Achieve and Maintain a Healthy Weight

"Food is the construction material for children's growing bodies. The growing body of a child is built from the deconstructed and then reconstructed components of food and drinks and nothing else.

High performance bodies warrant high performance fuel. We are, I trust, disinclined to construct anything we care about- least of all the children we love- out of junk."

Michael Katz



Parents and carers have an important role in helping children make good food choices and develop healthy eating habits.

Weight problems are common in Australian children. At least 1 in 4 children in Australia are overweight. Although throughout history there has always been overweight people, currently we are experiencing the highest levels of overweight and obesity ever recorded.

Parents setting a good example when it comes to shopping, using healthy cooking methods and eating healthy foods will have a positive effect on children when it comes to learning healthy eating habits and controlling their weight.

With many children having weight issues, there must be other contributing factors besides the type or amount of food eaten. These factors include the level of physical activity and the amount of time spent on sedentary activities such as 'screen time' (TV, iPad, computer, mobile phone etc.) in addition to the food eaten.

If a child's energy consumption is the same as the energy used for growth and activity, the body is said to be in energy balance. If a child is in energy balance, they grow normally. If a child consumes more energy (calories or

kilojoules) than they burn up, their bodies do an excellent job of storing excess calories as fat. With so many delicious foods and drinks available, it is easy to over consume without realising how many calories are being ingested (the energy balance law also applies to adults).

Some people may think 'being overweight runs in the family - the family genes are responsible'. In reality, the reason is probably that the whole family is consuming more calories than they burn.

So what can be done?

There are many reasons for overweight and obesity in modern society. However all the causes boil down to eating too much or burning too few calories.

Here are just a few things to try if your child is overweight

- Get them to eat breakfast. Having breakfast helps children to concentrate and reduces their need to snack before morning tea time.
- Have regular meal and mid meal times. This will help to stop 'grazing' (snacking all through the day). 'Grazing'

is not good for teeth and can lead to poor eating habits and over eating

- Enjoy meals together as a family. This then becomes time for talking and is an opportunity for modelling healthy food choices.
- Involve your children in shopping and food preparation. Teaching children basic cookery methods and healthy food preparation will hold them in good stead when they are older. Adults who have no cooking skills are more likely to consume more take-away and fast foods most of which are high in fat, sugar and salt. These foods are classified as 'sometime foods' to be eaten only occasionally.
- Encourage children to drink water as the main drink of choice. Water is the best thirst quencher. In child care, sugary drinks such as soft drinks, cordial and fruit juice are not available yet children seem to manage quite well to quench their thirst with water. (If there is only water or milk in your home, what other choice do they have?).
- Where possible choose wholegrain breads, crackers and breakfast cereals e.g. Multigrain breads, Weetbix™, Mini Wheats™, Just Right™. These products are more filling than more processed white varieties.
- Provide reduced fat dairy foods (milk, yoghurt and cheese) for children over two years and skim milk for children over five years old. If given from a young age, these products are usually accepted.
- Encourage your child to eat a variety of vegetables at both meal and snack time. Only one in twenty 4 – 8 year old children eat the recommended amount of vegetables each day. Serve plenty (about ½ a plate) of vegetables or salad at main meal time. A snap lock bag of vegetable sticks is great in the lunch box or on a trip to the supermarket. Vegetables not only provide nutrients, they are low in calories compared to many other foods.

When in child care, children will often eat vegetables that they don't eat at home. This is often due to 'peer pressure' or peer modelling. When it comes to food acceptance in the home, setting a good example can have a positive effect



Contact Us!

This fact sheet is produced by the Central Coast Public Health/Community Nutrition Team. If you have any suggestions or nutrition topics you would like covered please contact us by telephone on 4320 3691 or fax on 4320 2828.

Health Star Rating

- When shopping, look for foods with a health star rating of at least 3 or more. The more stars, the better. Download the "Food Switch" app which will enable you to scan nearly every product in the supermarket and see the health star rating of that food.



Check the health star rating on low fat yoghurts, low fat flavoured milk and wholegrain crackers as there is a wide variation of star rating for each product.

- Choose healthy snack foods (fruit, vegetables, low fat dairy and wholemeal crackers).

Currently 40% of a child's calories come from discretionary or 'sometime' foods. Chips, biscuits, chocolates, soft drinks and cordial etc. are highly processed, require little chewing, are high in calories and do not satisfy hunger or provide nutrients for growing bodies.

- If your child is asking for food after their meal or mid meal (snack), offer only healthy food. If this is refused they can't be that hungry. If they are asking for food just because they are bored perhaps you could suggest they do something active.

Children should be involved in a variety of physical activity for at about three hours a day. This can be in short periods of 15 – 20 minutes. Encourage outdoor play and being active together as a family. Having children help with suitable home chores should give parents more time to be active with children.

- Ensure your child gets enough sleep. Lack of sleep increases the risk of becoming overweight. Children less than 12 years need 10 – 12 hours sleep.

Limiting screen time just before bedtime will help them get to sleep. Children should not have television or other electronic devices in their bedroom.

