

WHY YOUR CHILD'S WEIGHT MATTERS

Your weight, your health series



Weighing and measuring in schools

Children in reception year and year 6 are now being weighed and measured in school, as part of efforts to improve children's health and well-being. We urge you to encourage your child to participate in this exercise.

Evidence suggests overweight children are highly likely to become overweight adults, with health problems getting worse as they get older.

Parents can do a lot to help their children maintain a healthy weight. This depends on both healthy eating and physical activity. Even a small change in weight reduces the risk of health problems. This booklet provides some practical tips that parents can use to help their families stay healthy.

You can obtain your child's height and weight from your Primary Care Trust (PCT). If you are not aware who your PCT is, you should ask your child's school nurse or visit www.nhs.uk/England/AuthoritiesTrusts/pct

Healthy children

It's easy to miss the fact that your child could be overweight. But children are getting heavier these days and that's bad news for their health – for you and for them – as they get older.

Does it matter?

Children who are overweight are more likely to be obese as adults or get diabetes or heart disease in later life. But health is not the only issue; they could also be affected by:

- Teasing or bullying;
- Low self-esteem;
- Embarrassment when playing games and sports; or
- Difficulty in being active (e.g., getting breathless quickly).

Even if your child is not overweight or obese, it is important that they eat healthily and take part in daily physical activity. The tips outlined in this leaflet are relevant to all children, no matter what their weight is.

What can I do?

As a parent, sometimes you can tell if your child is overweight by the fit of their clothes. If their clothes are right for their height but too tight around the waist, they could be overweight.

Keep an eye on your child's weight, even from the baby stage. Spotting that your child is overweight before they start school is important because it can help you prevent them becoming obese in later life.

What to do if you are concerned about your child's weight

The best thing you can do to help your child develop healthy eating habits and be more active is to show them how it's done! Children who see their parents, grandparents and carers following a healthy lifestyle tend to learn by example and it will help them develop good habits. These habits become normal and part of everyday life.

Most overweight children do not need to diet. They may not even need to lose weight. As they grow taller, aim to keep their weight about the same. That means they grow into their ideal weight as they get taller.

If you would like help interpreting your child's height and weight or you have any concerns about your child's weight please visit:
www.direct.gov.uk/childweight

Healthy eating for children

It is not a good idea to count calories for children. Eating regular sit-down meals as a family, limiting high-calorie snacks and sugar-rich drinks, and trying to avoid 'food on the run' will help get your child into good habits for life. Resist the temptation to give your child sweets and chocolate for rewards or comfort.



Every day, all children should aim to eat:

- Five or more servings of a variety of fruit and vegetables (fruit with breakfast and for snacks, and some vegetables, salad or fruit at every mealtime) – visit www.5aday.nhs.uk;
- Meals that are based on starchy foods, eg potatoes, pasta, rice, bread, breakfast cereal or other cereal;
- Lower fat dairy foods – milk, yoghurt, fromage frais or cheese – the lower fat varieties are best once children are over five; and
- Protein rich foods – poultry, fish, eggs, beans, pulses and lentils.

Small amounts of low fat spread on bread or toast, and oil for cooking, in sauces or salad dressings, help children enjoy healthy, tasty meals.

Savoury and sweet snacks (like crisps, biscuits and chocolate) and sugary drinks should be kept to a minimum.



Healthy eating habits

To help your child adopt healthy eating habits start them at a young age. Schools are now required to meet new nutritional standards for school food, so children will only be offered healthy food choices while they are at school. Getting them to eat healthier options at home will be consistent with what they get at school and help them towards healthier eating habits. Try and do as many of these as you can:

- Sit together as a family to eat your meal if you can.
- Switch the television off when you're eating.
- Eat healthy foods yourself and be positive about them.
- Get the family to try new foods.
- Encourage and praise 'good eating' instead of nagging.
- Involve the children in food preparation.

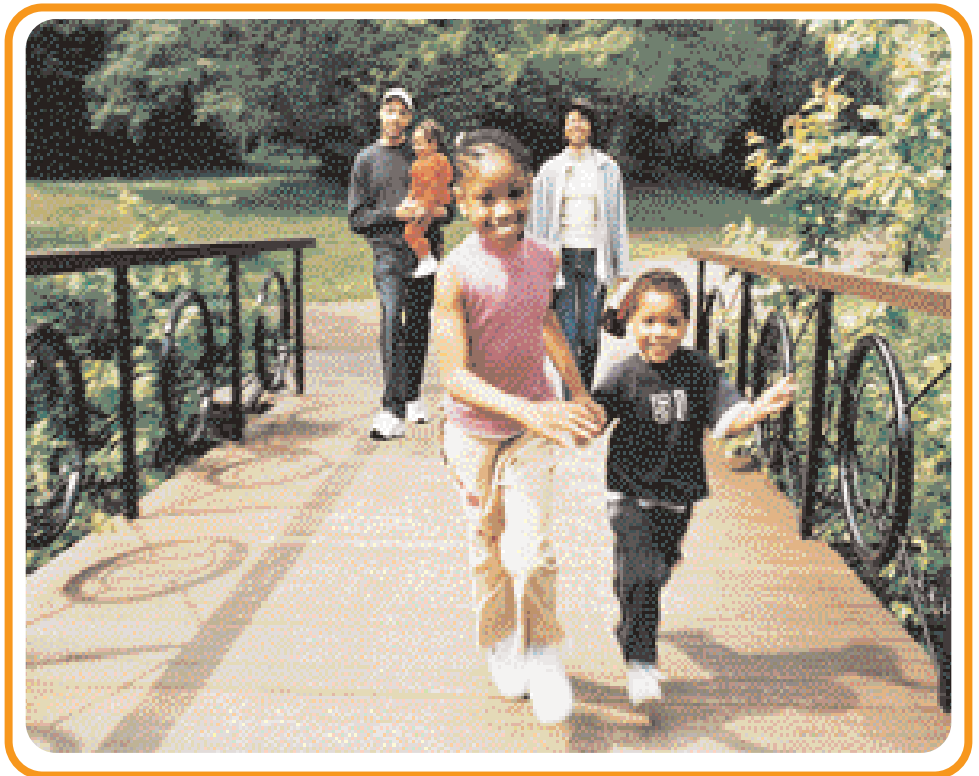
Further information is available at
www.eatwell.gov.uk/agesandstages/children
www.parentlineplus.org.uk
and check the food and healthy eating section
www.schoolfoodtrust.org.uk



Active children

All children should aim to be active for at least one hour every day. Restrict screen time (computer and TV) to two hours a day. Help your children find activities that they enjoy. For most children, playing in the playground or park or running around outside is a real joy – whatever the weather. Try to incorporate activity into your everyday family life and enjoying sport should be part of this.

A variety of activity is important to help them develop strong bones, muscle strength and flexibility. It can be natural and spontaneous (in the playground, playing outside), planned (walking to school) or proper school sports. Remember to praise your children when they do well and do not criticise them if they are not as good as others.



On the move

Here are some ideas to help your children achieve the one hour a day, in addition to the 2 hours of PE and sport a week at school, and any after-school activities they may participate in.

WITH PARENTS

Walking, cycling or scootering to school
Kicking a football in the park
Walking the dog
Obstacle courses
Walks with picnics in town parks
Rounders
Fruit picking
Visits to city farms
Nature trails
Trips to the local playground
Bike rides
Playing frisbee
Running
Walking to the shops

IN THE LOCAL PLAYGROUND OR PARK

Tag
Hopscotch
Hula hoop
Hide and seek
Skipping
Football
Playing Frisbee
Running
Cricket

AT HOME

Indoor soft play
Dancing to music or with a dance mat

AT THE LEISURE CENTRE

Swimming
Gymnastics
Trampolining
Badminton
Climbing walls

AT LOCAL OUTDOOR COURTS

Basketball
Netball
Tennis
Skateboarding

Further information is available at
www.playgroundfun.org.uk
www.activeplaces.com



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