

Miss Katie's Kids Korner

Dealing with an Overweight Child

by Katie Taylor

There has been a lot of press lately about childhood obesity. Headlines like these: "Percentage of Overweight Kids has Tripled Since the 70's!" "Is Your Child Heading for a Heart Attack, Diabetes, or Stroke?" shout from newsstands.

Dealing with an overweight child is not only a health issue but an emotional one as well. They know they're fat. Their self-esteem is low and gets lower with every Oreo. But how can you be supportive of their life choices, concerned about their health, and not make them self-conscious about their weight?

In order for your children to change their eating patterns, you need to change your food preparation and shopping patterns. You also need to set a good example so that "dieting" becomes a way of life rather than a sacrifice.

☛ Eat less, Exercise more

In addition to "super size" portions, kids don't get enough exercise. They spend their after-school hours in front of the TV or computer. Change that pattern! Get them up and moving. Take a walk, play ball, wrestle on the floor. You don't have to give up TV; make every commercial break an exercise break. How many sit-ups, jumping jacks, push-ups, and knee bends can you do in 60 seconds?

☛ Stop rewarding with food

Food is love, but food isn't a substitute for love. Try showing your approval with rewards other than food. Buy stickers. Young children love stickers and sometimes just being able to wear them is enough. As children get older, they want more and bigger things, so have them earn them. Make a chart and post it someplace they can see it. Put in big letters the GOAL ITEM and tally the number of stickers necessary to "buy" that item. Put a dollar value on each sticker and put away that amount in a separate place.

☛ When you eat, eat

Make the car a "no eating zone." Have your meals inside the restaurant or take it home to be eaten at the dinner table. Ban books, television

and phone calls during mealtime. Thanks to VCRs and answering machines, you aren't going to miss anything in the 25 or so minutes your family spends together consuming a meal.

☛ Eat dessert later

Make dessert a special treat rather than right after the meal. Remember when your mother told you not to go swimming until an hour after you ate? Make that the rule for dessert. If after an hour, they still want dessert, give it to them. For healthier dessert substitutes, consider low fat frozen yogurt instead of ice cream, graham crackers rather than cookies and a piece of fresh fruit instead of candy.

☛ When you eat is as important as what you eat.

I met a mother who fed her teenaged children dinner as soon as they got home from school. She knew that they had eaten lunch at 11 AM and needed more than a snack at the end of the day. This seems a bit extreme, but it worked for her. I'm not suggesting that you serve dinner at 4:00, but if your kids are going through half a bag of potato chips and two cans of soda right after school, they need to be steered to some healthier choices. Serve them a half sandwich, a small piece of fruit and a glass of milk. They may not want dinner, but at least they will have eaten something with more nutritional value than Ding Dongs, Ho-Hos, and Yoo-hoos.

☛ Make eating right easy

Keep plenty of fresh vegetables and fruit in the front of the refrigerator. Teach your children how to prepare healthy meals for themselves.

☛ It's never too late to change.

I read somewhere that if you can do something for 21 days in a row, the pattern will be established. Start today. Make exercise a part of your child's daily life. Ration the candy. Keep "fattening" foods out of the house for a month. Set the example for healthy eating by preparing whole grain and natural foods. Your child's life is on the line. It's up to you to save it.

(Katie Taylor teaches *Kindermusik* at the *Christ Lutheran Church*. There is ongoing registration for classes. To register, or find out more about the program, you may contact her at 647-7291.)

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