



## Encourage, support overweight child

**My son is much too heavy for his age (he's 13) and my mother is hinting we should try putting him on a low-carb diet. I'm not sure that's a good idea, but I do think we need to do something. Any ideas?**

Most dietitians are extremely wary of recommending weight-loss diets for kids. Even with so many overweight and obese children, there are better ways to address the problem than subjecting children to adult-type weight-loss programs.

The thing is, children are still growing, and their bodies need the nutrients — including carbohydrates and, yes, even fat — to grow properly. Typically, boys go through a growth spurt between the ages of 12 and 15 — nearly every organ in the body grows during this period. Even a sedentary 13-year-old boy requires 2,000 calories a day for proper growth and to maintain his weight, according to the 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans. Those who are moderately active (the equivalent of walking briskly 1.5 to 3 miles a day) need 2,200 calories a day. And those who are even more active need 2,600 calories a day.

Still, your instincts to “do something” also are probably on target. Tackling a weight problem now can help your son avert health problems as well as boost his body image and self-esteem.

Still, a low-carb diet, in particular, is probably not the best idea. A recent study in the *Journal of Pediatrics* compared three different diets among children ages 7 to 12. All three showed some success, but children on the low-carb diet simply couldn't stay on it after six months. Healthy eating needs to become a way of life, not something you start and stop.

The best advice is to, first, support, encourage and accept your child at any weight. Children's and teens' self-esteem can be fragile, and if your son is overweight, he knows it better than anyone else. A parent's unconditional love and support can go a long way.

Second, focus on health and fitness rather than weight loss. Stock up on fresh fruits and vegetables. Reduce the amount of chips in the pantry and ice cream in the freezer, and cut way back on fast food. Find ways to incorporate more activity into your family's day-to-day life. Lead by example: If you sit in front of the TV or computer for two to three hours after dinner, your son will, too.

There are many online resources you can draw on for more ideas. In particular, see “Helping Your Overweight Child” from the Weight-control Information Network at <http://1.usa.gov/helpoverwt>, or WebMD's “Overweight Children: Tips for Parents” at <http://bit.ly/webmdtips>.

*Chow Line is a service of Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH, 43210-1044, or [filipic.3@osu.edu](mailto:filipic.3@osu.edu).*



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY  
EXTENSION

OHIO AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH  
AND DEVELOPMENT CENTER

---

**April 6, 2012**

---

**By Martha Filipic**

614-292-9833

[filipic.3@osu.edu](mailto:filipic.3@osu.edu)

---

**Editor:**

This column was reviewed by Julie Kennel, nutrition program manager for Ohio State University Extension and director of the Dietetic Internship Program in the Department of Human Nutrition in the College of Education and Human Ecology.

---

**Communications and  
Technology  
News and Marketing**  
2021 Coffey Road  
Columbus, OH 43210-1044  
614-292-2011

208 Research Services  
Building  
1680 Madison Ave.  
Wooster, OH 44691-4096  
330-263-3780

Ohio State University Extension embraces human diversity and is committed to ensuring that all research and related educational programs are available to clientele on a nondiscriminatory basis without regard to race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, disability, or veteran status. This statement is in accordance with United States Civil Rights Laws and the USDA. Keith L. Smith, Ph.D., Associate Vice President for Agricultural Administration and Director, Ohio State University Extension For Deaf and Hard of Hearing, please contact Ohio State University Extension using your preferred communication (e-mail, relay services, or video relay services). Phone 1-800-750-0750 between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. EST Monday through Friday. Inform the operator to dial 614-292-6181.