



Help kids eat less and move more

I keep hearing more and more about the problem of childhood obesity. How big of a problem is it really?

Childhood obesity is increasing at alarming rates, and health authorities are concerned about the implications for weight-related health problems for youth not only later in life, but during childhood as well.

In the past 30 years, childhood obesity rates in the United States have tripled. Now, about one in three children — more than 22 million youth — are overweight or obese.

The problem is so great that experts fear one-third of all children who are 10 years old or younger now will contract diabetes at some point in their lives. Overweight children also face higher risks later in life of heart disease, high blood pressure, cancer and even asthma.

The reason for the extra pounds? Children — and adults, too — tend to eat more and move less than ever.

According to “Let’s Move,” a national campaign to fight childhood obesity, children today tend to eat up to three snacks a day, adding about 200 calories a day to the diet, compared with one daily snack 30 years ago. About 20 percent of school-age children eat up to six snacks a day.

Portion sizes also are taking their toll. According to the National Institutes of Health “We Can” website, a typical cheeseburger 20 years ago had 333 calories, compared with today’s norm of 590 calories. A blueberry

muffin in 1990 was more likely to be about 1.5 ounces and 210 calories, compared with today’s 5-ounce, 500-calorie versions. A serving of regular soda pop 20 years ago was likely to be about 6.5 ounces with 82 calories instead of today’s 20-ounce bottles with 250 calories.

Children used to be more active, too. According to “Let’s Move,” the average American child spends more than 7.5 hours a day watching TV and movies, using cell phones and computers for entertainment, and playing video games. Only one-third of high schoolers get the recommended levels of physical activity.

Parents and kids can take simple steps that can make big differences. Many are outlined at <http://www.letsmove.gov>, including:

- Keep fruits and vegetables within reach; store cookies, chips and ice cream out of immediate sight.
- Schedule specific family activities at regular times. Instead of saying “we need to be more active,” plan a 30-minute neighborhood walk after dinner three evenings a week.
- When shopping, park the car as far from the store as possible. Make it a game: Count the steps as you walk to the store — and next time, try to park even farther away.

Many more ideas are available at <http://www.letsmove.gov>.

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@cfaes.osu.edu.



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