



Team up water with healthy diet, activity

I heard something about how school water fountains can help kids lose weight. Can you tell me more?

The study is an interesting one. Reported in the April 2009 issue of *Pediatrics*, researchers examined habits and outcomes of nearly 3,000 school children in low-income areas of two cities in Germany.

Schools in one city got new water fountains with filtered water, and each student was given a plastic water bottle they could keep and refill whenever they wanted. The teachers gave four 45-minute lessons about the health benefits of water. After a few months, teachers also taught a “motivation unit” on goal-setting strategies to encourage them to drink more water. And after that, students received new water bottles with an improved design for easier handling.

During the academic year, the study periodically measured students’ water consumption. Before and after the study, researchers measured students’ body mass index.

Researchers found that making drinking water easy and accessible and teaching children about the benefits of water increased students’ consumption of water by 1.1 glasses a day, and reduced the children’s risk of becoming overweight by 31 percent when compared with the students who didn’t receive the intervention.

Of course, getting plenty of water isn’t a panacea to avoiding overweight or obesity. If you’re interested in

learning more about healthy eating patterns for children, take a look at the U.S. Department of Agriculture “Eat Smart, Play Hard” Web site from its Food and Nutrition Service (go to <http://teammnutrition.usda.gov/> and click on “Eat Smart. Play Hard” on the bottom left, and then click “Web Site for Parents”).

The Web site offers specific suggestions on planning meals, incorporating plenty of vegetables, fruit, whole grains and calcium-rich foods, and even offers dozens of healthy recipes.

The information also includes ideas for encouraging more activity for the whole family. That’s important, especially as children get older. A 2008 study in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* found that children’s physical activity tends to drop dramatically from age 9 to 15. The study followed 800 youngsters for six years, and at age 9, they averaged roughly three hours of activity on weekdays and weekends. By age 15, they averaged only 49 minutes per weekday, and just 35 minutes per weekend.

Eating more healthfully and being more active remain the mainstays in helping both children and adults maintain a healthy weight. But I think we can toast to that with a fresh glass of water — and that could help, too.

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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AND DEVELOPMENT CENTER

For the week of
April 19, 2009

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