

FOR MORE INFORMATION

There are a number of resources available online for parents who would like additional information on how to foster healthy eating habits for their children. Following are some Web sites parents may find beneficial:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention/National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion Division of Adolescent and School Health, www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth

U.S. Department of Agriculture, www.mypyramid.gov

Nutrition for Kids, www.nutritionforkids.com

Healthy Eating Tips, <http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/tips>

Guidance on How to Understand & Use the Nutrition Facts Panel on Food Labels, <http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/foodlab.html>



KEYS TO A HEALTHY DIET

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The keys to healthy eating are *variety, balance and moderation*. It's important that your family eats a variety of foods, including plenty of vegetables, fruits and whole grain products. No single food or food group supplies all the nutrients in the amounts your family needs for good health. Also, include low-fat and nonfat dairy products, lean meats, poultry, fish and legumes (lentils and beans) daily. Drink water to quench your thirst, and go easy on salt, sugar and saturated fat.

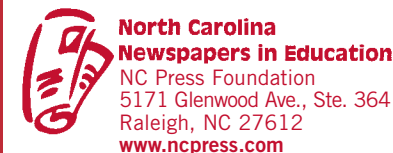
FOLLOWING ARE SOME ADDITIONAL TIPS TO HELP CHILDREN START EATING HEALTHIER:

- Try to keep track of your children's meal/snack and physical activity patterns so you can help them balance the amount and types of food they eat with the amount of physical activity they perform.
- Encourage your family to eat at least five servings of brightly colored vegetables and fruits a day. You can start the day with 100 percent fruit or vegetable juice. (Juices made from concentrates are not as healthy as 100 percent fruit or vegetable juices.) Slice fruit on top of cereal, serve salad with lunch, offer an apple as an afternoon snack and include vegetables with dinner.
- Leave candy, soft drinks, chips and cookies at the store. Substitute them with fruits, vegetables, nuts and low-fat or nonfat milk products. Your child will soon learn to make smart food choices outside your home as well.
- Serve children child-sized portions, and let your child ask for more if he or she is still hungry. Don't force children to clean their plates. Try measuring food items to learn to estimate the amount of food on a plate.

It's also important to eat smart. Sharing meals is an ideal way for your family to spend time together. Be consistent by establishing a family meal routine with set times for breakfast, lunch, dinner and snacks. When you serve a meal, your child can choose to eat it or not, but don't offer to substitute an unhealthy alternative when your child refuses to eat what you've served. It's important to restrict children's access to the refrigerator and snack cupboards and to limit kids' snacking when watching TV. Also, reward your children with praise and fun activities rather than with food.

MAKING the GRADE

Building Healthy Eating Habits



North Carolina Newspapers in Education
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MAKING the GRADE

WINTER 2006



BUILDING Healthy Eating Habits

A report from the *North Carolina Medical Journal* found that children in North Carolina are more likely to be overweight than children from other states. Statewide, one in five children is overweight, and one in four teens is overweight. This can lead to increased health risks such as heart disease, diabetes and high blood pressure. By helping children build healthy eating habits early, parents and communities can improve North Carolina's statistics. This tabloid includes information and resources to help parents and community members make for a healthier youth.

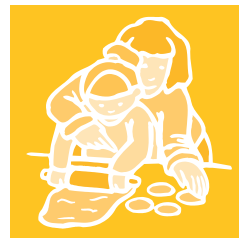
CHILD NUTRITION IS KEY TO A HEALTHY, ACTIVE LIFE

A report from the *North Carolina Medical Journal* found that children in North Carolina are more likely to be overweight than children from other states. The statistics are sobering: statewide, one in five children is overweight, and one in four teens is overweight. Obesity is a disorder that involves eating too much and/or the wrong kinds of food. Other eating disorders involve eating too little. The 2005 North Carolina Youth Risk Behavior Survey found that 5.6 percent of North Carolina high school students report participating in unhealthy behaviors to control or lose weight.

While genetics and environment may increase a person's risk for becoming overweight, choices and behavior have a much greater influence on health and wellness. A study conducted by the Surgeon General's office found that 43 percent of adolescents watch two or more hours of television each day and that children, especially girls, become less physically active as they move through adolescence. As exercise decreases, food portion sizes increase. Restaurants and the food packaging industry add to the problem by offering portions that are too large, making it difficult for many Americans to determine proper portion sizes.

When children are overweight or obese, they are more likely to develop health problems that were once considered adult diseases: type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, heart disease and digestive disorders (not to mention the increased social and emotional problems that can/may come with being labeled "overweight"). In June 2004, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention stated that today's children are the first generation of Americans that will *not* have a longer life expectancy than their parents. **THE GOOD NEWS is that it's not too late to teach our children how to adopt a healthier lifestyle by eating better. Public schools and parents can partner to ensure that children are getting the nutrition they need to lead a healthy, active life.**

HEALTHY EATING HABITS BEGIN AT HOME



Parents are their child's first and best teacher in establishing life-long, healthy, eating habits, and schools depend on parental support in helping children develop optimum eating and fitness habits. With the increased number of children who are overweight and suffer from related health conditions, nutrition education has taken on even greater importance.

Helping your children understand the importance of healthy eating involves more than just telling them *what* they should eat. Children need opportunities to make sound dietary decisions. At home, parents can help their children practice making healthy food choices by providing nutritious foods and beverages that promote a healthy lifestyle. When children have the opportunity to practice what they learn, they are more likely to make healthy eating decisions that become second nature.

Parents also can help their children make healthful food choices by reviewing the school lunch menu with them. Talk with your children about healthful choices, and encourage them to think about the foods they will choose before they get to the cafeteria. Schools in North Carolina are required to offer wholesome, healthful meals that are in keeping with the U.S. Dietary Guidelines for Americans. These guidelines encourage us to choose foods low in fat, sugar and salt and choose more fruits, vegetables and whole grain foods.

There are a number of activities that you can do with your children to help them start making healthy food choices. Many parents struggle with getting children to eat vegetables or try new foods. **Why not involve your child in planning the dinner menu?** By helping to decide what to eat, children have ownership in what will be served. This may also encourage them to try different foods.

Parents may want to have their children look through the food section of the newspaper for possible recipe ideas. Are there some recipes that have less fat than others? **With your child, discuss the recipe's nutritional value** and suggest ingredients that could be substituted to make it more nutritious and perhaps even taste better. Talk about what other items could be served to balance the meal's total calories (i.e., fix a low-calorie entrée if you're planning a rich dessert).

Cooking can be a great way to strengthen your child's math and reading skills as well. Planning menus, researching and calculating how much of each food is needed, then actually shopping for the ingredients can help develop math and organizational skills. This exercise also will help your child understand what to look for and what to avoid when shopping for food as an adult. With your child, why not pretend you are planning a party for friends? Together, look at grocery store

BODY MASS INDEX

Many physicians and researchers use the Body Mass Index (BMI) to determine whether children and teens are underweight, overweight or at risk for either condition. BMI uses a mathematical formula that takes into consideration both a person's height and weight. Since the proper amount of body fat changes as children grow and boys and girls differ as they mature, it's important to use a BMI measure specifically designed for the gender and age group. Many pediatricians check children's BMIs annually. You may want to ask your pediatrician to discuss healthy food choices with your child.

ads in your local newspaper, and choose foods that taste good and are good for you. Figure out how much of each item you need to buy and the amount of money you will need to spend.

Learning how to read food labels and talking about what the information means can bolster reading and analytical skills. **Have your child help you plan a balanced meal to serve for dinner.** Get ideas from the food section of your local newspaper. Once you've decided what to prepare and have purchased the necessary items, your child can help you prepare the meal. Meal preparation provides numerous opportunities to practice using fractions, measurement and following directions. Incorporating this process into one meal a week will not only help your child's reading and math skills, but your bond will grow stronger, you will demonstrate collaboration and you will teach him or her skills needed for life.

Parents also may want to use the meal preparation time to talk with their children about any problems that they or other family members are having related to eating or discuss the larger problems of over- or under-eating. Discuss causes, effects and solutions in addition to obstacles to overcome. Apply that same approach to other health problems presented in newspapers and other sources. Help your child look for workable solutions.

A CLOSE LOOK AT MYPYRAMID FOR KIDS

The U.S. Department of Agriculture recently released its *MyPyramid for Kids* to help children understand the importance of a healthy diet and the healthy food choices they need to make on a daily basis. Visit <http://www.mypyramid.gov/kids/> for additional information.

A Close Look at MyPyramid For Kids

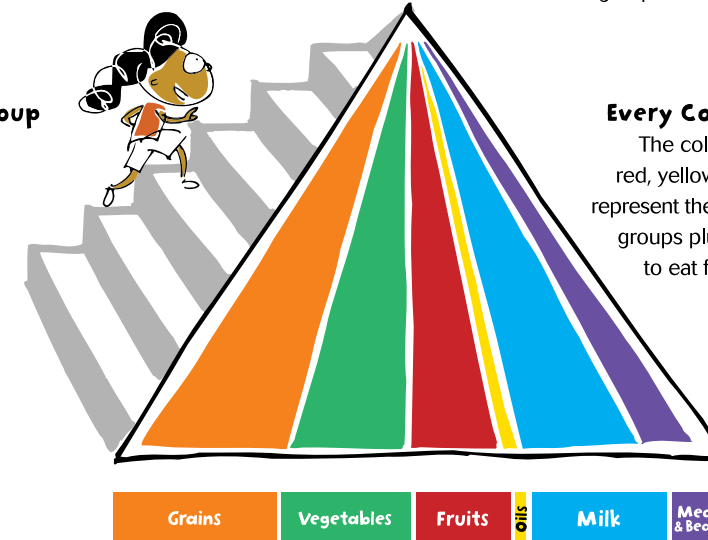
MyPyramid for Kids reminds you to be physically active every day, or most days, and to make healthy food choices. Every part of the new symbol has a message for you. Can you figure it out?

Be Physically Active Every Day

The person climbing the stairs reminds you to do something active every day, like running, walking the dog, playing, swimming, biking, or climbing lots of stairs.

Choose Healthier Foods From Each Group

Why are the colored stripes wider at the bottom of the pyramid? Every food group has foods that you should eat more often than others; these foods are at the bottom of the pyramid.



Eat More From Some Food Groups Than Others

Did you notice that some of the color stripes are wider than others? The different sizes remind you to choose more foods from the food groups with the widest stripes.

Every Color Every Day

The colors orange, green, red, yellow, blue, and purple represent the five different food groups plus oils. Remember to eat foods from all food groups every day.

Make Choices That Are Right for You

MyPyramid.gov is a Web site that will give everyone in the family personal ideas on how to eat better and exercise more.

Take One Step at a Time

You do not need to change overnight what you eat and how you exercise. Just start with one new, good thing, and add a new one every day.



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PUBLIC SCHOOLS PARTNER WITH PARENTS FOR NUTRITION SUCCESS

In healthy schools, children are more alert, more focused on learning and miss less school. Reflecting the conviction that health issues are critical to academic success, the State Board of Education voted in 2004 to add the words "Healthy Students" to its second strategic priority focusing on Safe, Orderly and Caring Schools. Through this priority, the Board and the Department of Public Instruction intend to champion ways that educators and families can partner to help youngsters develop and maintain healthy lifestyles.

The majority of the state's public schools already are working to ensure that children understand the importance of a healthy diet and have the opportunity to actively choose healthy foods for breakfast and lunch. By offering more fresh fruits and vegetables at lunch, eliminating fried foods and whole milk and reducing the availability of à la carte foods and beverages high in sugar, school cafeteria staff are helping students make food choices to keep their bodies and minds strong throughout the school day.

Research shows that child nutrition affects student achievement. As part of the Healthful School Food Choices Pilot Program, elementary school students in seven North Carolina school systems are seeing healthier food choices. The Healthful School Food Choices Pilot Program reimburses pilot districts if food service revenues decrease because students opt not to purchase the healthful, nutritious food choices.

North Carolina also is one of three states chosen for the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Fruit and Vegetable Pilot Program. The state will receive \$5 million over the next five years to allow 25 limited-resource schools to increase fruit and vegetable consumption. Healthy foods will be available to all students in participating schools in a variety of school locations – not just the cafeteria – throughout the academic day. The program addresses two related problems: the rapidly increasing number of overweight children and the failure of 75 percent of elementary students to eat the recommended five or more servings of fruits and vegetables each day.

