

## Childhood Obesity

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We have all heard the alarming statistics about the increasing levels of obesity in children. We also know the difficulties parents face trying to keep their children healthy in our present environment of fast food, video games, and decreasing free play. Rather than throw up your hands in exasperation, there are some guidelines you can give parents to help make healthier choices for their children.

1) **Avoid “non-nutritive” fluids** - Giving kids a maximum of 8 ounces of full strength fruit juice each day (diluted as desired) will help decrease empty calories. Kids can get up to 3 glasses (24 ounces) of milk to ensure adequate calcium intake, and the remainder of their fluids should be plain water.

2) **Avoid fast food** - Most fast food meals are still loaded with excesses of fat, salt, and calories. Cut out as many as possible, and use the fruit and salads offered if you need to do fast food.

3) **Avoid “distracted” eating** - Distracted eating is any eating done away from the usual family meal table. If your child wants to snack while watching TV or doing homework, have them take a handful of pretzels, or a small bowl of popcorn. Then avoid getting second helpings until at least 15 minutes has passed, and encourage them to drink a glass of water before getting seconds. Or, just give them unlimited amounts of fruits or vegetables for snacks.

4) **Types of foods** - Substituting brown rice and whole wheat pasta for regular rice and pasta is a good start. Changing to lower fat types of dairy products can also be helpful. And children will sometimes eat fruit in place of other sweet snacks (like candy and fruit roll-ups) if the fruit is readily available. Just make the changes slowly and gradually.

5) **Keep them active** - Make time to have family fun activities (play in the park, ride bikes, play tennis or basketball, etc.) for an hour each day. And rainy days can be spent playing Twister, walking in the rain (you will dry off!), or walking around the mall. Just don't spend your mall time walking from Cinnabon to Jamba Juice and sampling all the goodies in between!

6) **Decrease inactivity** - There is no healthy standard for how much screen time your child should have each day. Anything that keeps your children away from the TV, computer, or video game is going to keep them healthier overall.