

CHILDHOOD OBESITY MONTH – LET’S MOVE!

September is National Childhood Obesity Awareness Month. Childhood obesity has been a growing concern, as it has more than doubled in children in the past 30 years. It has also quadrupled in adolescents and teens.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):

- The percentage of obese children (ages 6 to 11 years) increased from 7% in 1980 to nearly 18% in 2012.
- The percentage of obese teens (ages 12 to 19 years) increased from 5% in 1982 to 21% in 2012.
- One in every three children ages 2 to 19 years is overweight or obese.
- Obese children and teens are more likely to have risk factors for heart disease. These include high cholesterol, high blood pressure, and bone or joint problems. Sleep apnea, and social and psychological problems such as bullying and low self-confidence can also occur.

Childhood obesity is now considered a national health crisis. In 2010, the First Lady’s *Let’s Move!* Initiative and President Obama’s Task Force on Childhood Obesity were created to tackle the problem of childhood obesity head-on.

What is Childhood Obesity?

According to the CDC, the definitions of childhood overweight and obesity are based on a person’s body mass index (BMI). This is calculated using height and weight, and is specific to age and gender. Being overweight is defined as having a BMI at or above the 85th percentile and less than the 95th percentile. Those at or above the 95th percentile are considered to be obese.

Causes

The *Let’s Move!* Initiative has enlisted several possible causes to childhood obesity:

- Children get to school by bus or car, instead of walking.
- Gym classes and after-school sports have been cut; children now spend their afternoons watching TV, playing video games, and surfing internet.
- The portion sizes of food are five times bigger than in years past.
- Children today have approximately three snacks a day, compared to having one snack a day 30 years ago.

In total, children are eating 31% more calories than 40 years ago. Other possible factors for the obesity epidemic

include the increasing cost of food and lack access to nearby grocery stores or playgrounds. The eating and exercise habits of family and friends can also influence a child’s behavior. If this problem is not solved, many children will be at risk for diseases like heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes and certain types of cancer.

What Can We Do?

The CDC has created the School Health Guidelines to Promote Healthy Eating and Physical Activity which recommend providing healthy food in school breakfasts and lunches, and safe parks and playgrounds.

The *Let’s Move!* Initiative has been very creative with their recommendations on preventing childhood obesity. One idea is called Planting a Kitchen Garden. The website offers a checklist you can follow to start your own garden at home and serve your family with healthy fresh meals. The *Let’s Move!* Initiative also encourages parents to set goals that everyone can achieve together to make physical activity a part of the family’s routine. These activities include:

- Tumbling in the leaves
- Building a snowman
- Dancing to favorite music
- Doing household cleaning
- Reducing TV and computer screen time
- Walking your children to school
- Celebrating a special occasion with a hike, a volleyball game, or a Frisbee match
- Activities that are easy to do anywhere, such as walking, jogging, jumping ropes, or aerobics
- Training together for a charity walk or run

The *Let’s Move!* Initiative suggests healthy meal planning for families, such as:

- Eating a healthy breakfast every day
- Cutting back on sugary drinks
- Replacing a candy dish with a fruit bowl
- Keeping an eye on portion sizes
- Eating together as a family

The *Let’s Move!* Initiative also provides recommendations for schools, local officials, community leaders, chefs, kids, and health care providers.

For more information, please visit www.letsmove.gov.