

Healthy Eating



- The high prevalence of body dissatisfaction leads many children to turn to unhealthy dieting or body change strategies.
- Counsellors at Kids Help Phone in Toronto say that not a day goes by that the sentence "I want to go on a diet and lose weight" isn't uttered at least once (Greey, 2000). Nine to 12-year-olds are talking about dieting (in comparison to 15 and 16-year-olds in the past).
- An Ontario study showed that 60% of a sample of 400 girls in grade 7 and 8 were dieting to lose weight, despite being within a healthy weight range.²
- A Nova Scotia study showed that by the time kids reach grade six, one in four girls and one in 10 boys have been on a diet. More than 40% of children who diet say they are doing it because parents and peers tell them they are fat.
- A recent study of 16,000 children aged 9 to 14 years found that dieting to control weight was not only ineffective, but actually promoted weight gain. This was attributed in part to repeated cycles of overeating between the restrictive diets.
- Research has found that peers have a big influence on whether or not a young adolescent girl might start to diet (e.g. peer modeling or pressure from peers to diet).
- What constitutes healthy eating? Children today receive messages about food/eating from numerous sources. On the one hand they are told to eat lots of fruits and vegetables, and on the other hand they are exposed to portion distortion (e.g. super-sizing your combo or all-you-can-eat meals). Most children today think that any fat in food is bad for them. Children tend to respond to societal messages about fat reduction in extreme ways, by eliminating all fat. As with protein and carbohydrates, fat is an essential nutrient. Labeled a "satiety nutrient", fat in food helps prevents us from feeling hungry in between meals.
- Some parents may not be aware that a low-fat diet suitable for many adults won't provide enough energy for growth (particularly for young children).
- Appetite might change during growth spurts or when activity level is increased (e.g. involvement in extra-curriculum activities and sports).



- According to Daina Kalnins, a registered dietitian at The Hospital for Sick Children, and author of Better Food for Kids, strict vegetarian, low-carbohydrate or dairy-free diets can also make it difficult to get enough calories (energy) into kids. Children who avoid certain foods due to allergies or medical concerns, or for religious, cultural, or philosophical reasons need to consult their doctor or a dietitian to find appropriate substitutes or supplements to ensure they get the energy they need. Developing healthy eating habits is important.
- Ellyn Satter, author of Secrets of Feeding a Healthy Family, recommends that parents "provide appropriate support, then let children grow up to get the bodies that are right for them." According to Satter, if the joy goes out of eating, nutrition suffers. Imposing rules about weight can undermine children's internal regulation.

What does normal eating involve?

- Eating regularly recommended servings from all food groups and not avoid "other" foods. E.g. dessert. (including the "sometimes food")
- Understanding portion size and energy density
- Eating regular meals and snacks
- Responding to body signals of hunger and fullness
- Creating a positive environment for meals
- Eating family meals together when possible
- Taking the time to relax, enjoy the food, and feel satiety
- As a child, did you have to clean your plate? Were you restricted in the amounts that you could eat? Was there only so much food to go around? Were you allowed to eat as much as you wanted of some foods but not of others?
- Remember, children restrict if adults model

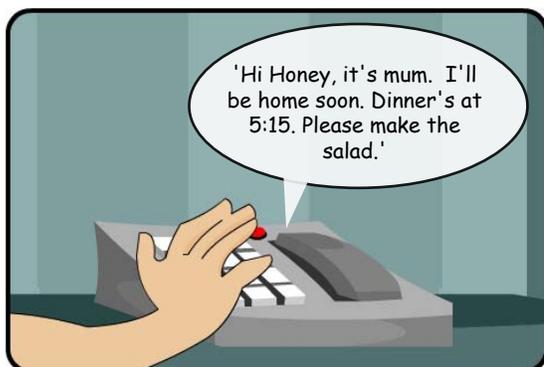
- Given the satiety nutrient in fat, the consumption of no fat or low-fat products can lead to feelings of hunger, which can get in the way of learning and concentration at school.

- How can we promote healthy eating (to help prevent childhood obesity) without contributing to the preoccupation of students with food, weight and shape?



- As Senator Hillary Clinton highlighted recently in her floor speech: "While it is so important to fight the obesity epidemic, we should not inadvertently send the wrong message by telling our children and adults simply to eat less and exercise. Unfortunately, many adolescents misinterpret this as a message that they should eat to achieve the body of a runway model.

- Anorexia and bulimia are increasingly common among our nation's youth. . ." "While it is important to prevent diabetes and heart disease that may result from obesity, eating disorders also have their own very serious consequences. Anorexia nervosa, which will affect 3.7 percent of American women sometime in their lifetime, leads to heart failure, kidney failure, and osteoporosis. In fact, a young woman is 12 times more likely to die than other women her age without anorexia. . ." To learn more about this speech contact: Jeanine C. Cogan, Ph.D. Policy Director Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action (202) 543-3842 jcogan5573@aol.com.



- Restrained eating leads to behavioural, physical, and emotional reactions, which leads to disinhibited eating (losing control over eating). The problem with undereating is that not only does it get in the way of feeling healthy, it can promote unhealthy eating patterns such as over-eating or losing control over eating. For that matter, regular over-eating (often a result of under-eating) can also make a person feel unhealthy.

- As a teacher, your unspoken example can strongly support what you tell children about healthy eating and healthy living (e.g. munching on fruit for a snack, avoiding talk about dieting or making jokes about how fattening some foods are, standing up for someone who is being teased about their weight or shape, emphasizing an inclusive body-positive focus in physical education activities, examining your own teaching practices to ensure that body image discrimination does not occur in your teaching methods).

- "How" is just as important as "what" we communicate about healthy eating. For example, if a student eats chips and pop for lunch every day, that person can be more likely to eat well if she/he is encouraged to include other foods in her/his meal plan instead of being told that the food she/he is eating is "junk or bad." All foods are good (including those containing fat); we just need them in different amounts. If your school has only vending machines with chips, chocolate bars, and pop, what message might that be sending to the students? Some students rely on those vending machines for their meals.

- Can school staff highlight the need for vending machine content changes and lobby to have more nutritious foods added? (e.g. adding milk, fruit, yogurt, crackers and cheese, juice to the existing machine snacks) The Toronto Partners for Student Nutrition instituted as a pilot project a salad bar in one of the school's cafeterias. The project was successful in that students tried new foods and liked the buffet system.

- Can students earn credits if they eat a balanced meal or snacks during school? Included in that would be a credit earned for eating "other foods" to discourage students who are inclined to restrict their calories and undereat.

- Well-balanced meals and snacks + a positive eating environment = a well-nourished child.