Maintaining Healthy Weight in Children

More children and adults are becoming overweight. Excess weight increases the risk of other health problems, such as heart disease and obesity. Learning to eat a healthy diet at an early age will help prevent excess weight gain that may be hard to lose later in life. The following tips will help you encourage your child to eat a healthy, nutritious diet without gaining excess weight.

Activity:

Take time to enjoy recreational activities with your child. Playing in the park, swimming, gymnastics and team sports, such as soccer and softball, are all healthy activities. Participation in these activities may help your child to enjoy physical exercise and activities.

Limit the amount of time your child spends watching television and movies, as well as playing computer and video games (2 hours a day or less).

Healthy Meals and Snacks:

Three meals and several snacks are important each day. Healthy snacks such as fresh fruits, vegetables, cereal and yogurt will help your child get the necessary amounts of foods from each food group. Avoid snacks that have only calories from sweets and fats. Offer meals and snacks in one place for a limited amount of time. This will prevent grazing over several hours of time.

Variety of Foods:

Offer your child a variety of foods from each food group (bread and grains, fruits, vegetables, milk and dairy products and protein foods) every day. Young children tend to prefer familiar foods and reject new foods. A child may need to be offered an unfamiliar vegetable or other healthy food as many as 5 to 10 times before they like it.

Fruits and Vegetables:

Fruits and vegetables are naturally low in calories, rich in nutrients and should be included at each meal. When fruits and vegetables are included in a meal, the amount of high calorie, high fat foods eaten tends to decrease.

Low-Fat Dairy Products:

After the age of two, children receive enough fat from 2%, 1%, or skim milk. If your child does not care to drink 2 to 3 eight ounce glasses of milk each day, calcium from other sources such as low-fat yogurt or low-fat cheese is important.

Limited High-Fat Foods:

Limit the amount of fried foods, sausage, bacon, high fat luncheon meats, chips, pastries and fast foods offered at meals and snacks. Decrease the amount of butter, margarine, mayonnaise and salad dressings used in preparing foods. Help your child develop a taste for lower fat, baked foods by serving them more often. Use herbs and spices rather than extra fat to flavor your foods.
**Limited Sugary Drinks:**

Limit drinks with sugar and calories in them such as soda pop, Kool-Aid®, flavored water, fruit juice, Gatorade®, sports drinks and other sweetened beverages. These drinks can add 500-1000 calories a day to a child’s diet if they are offered routinely throughout the day. Your child will not miss the extra nutrients found in juice as long as several servings of fresh or canned fruit are offered each day. A special drinking container may be a good way to encourage your child to drink water as a thirst quencher.