



Crack the Code to Healthier Kids

Overweight and obesity is now the most common medical condition seen in childhood and adolescence in the United States. Among boys and girls ages 6-19, approximately 30 percent are overweight and 15 percent are obese. (Source: *Pediatrics*, January 2004)

Childhood obesity has serious consequences. Untreated, obesity increases the risk of high blood pressure, high cholesterol, heart disease, Type 2 diabetes, asthma and for some children serious psychosocial problems, according to the American Obesity Association.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, over 98 percent of school age children do not meet the dietary recommendations for fruit, vegetables, grains and dairy foods. Teen girls have especially low intakes of fruit and dairy foods.

Recent estimates from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's national nutrition survey show an alarming trend in children's choice of beverage. Soft drink consumption has nearly doubled in the past two decades among girls and boys ages 6 to 11, while milk consumption has declined.

A study published in the *Journal of Pediatrics*, found that as children drink more beverages with added sugar they drink less milk, consume more calories and fewer nutrients. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends replacing sweetened drinks with 100 percent fruit juice or vegetable juices, water and low fat white or flavored milk. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, nearly seven out of 10 schools allow students to purchase nutrient poor foods such as sports drinks, fruit drinks, high fat snack foods and sodas during their lunch period.

American children and adolescents today are less physically active as a group than were previous generations. In June 2002, President Bush issued the President's Health and Fitness Initiative recommending that children should engage in 60 minutes of moderately intense physical exercise each day for their health.

More than one third of young people in grades 9-12 do not regularly engage in vigorous physical activity. Only 17 percent of middle schools and 2 percent of high schools require daily physical activity for all students. (Source: President Council on Physical Fitness and Sports)

A research review published in the *Journal of the American College of Nutrition* suggests children's eating behavior and overall quality of their diet is strongly influenced by family and friends. Children and teens who eat with their family eat more healthful foods, including calcium rich dairy foods and fewer soft drinks.

Knowing which foods are considered "healthy" remains a mystery to many parents. In fact, according to a 2003 study by the Food Marketing Institute, more than 80 percent of food shoppers are making 'a lot' or 'some' effort to eat healthfully, yet they remain confused about what is healthy. Nearly two thirds of parent shoppers strongly agree that experts are likely to change their definitions of "healthy" foods in the future.