

Give Your Kids Healthy Habits

Exercise and Healthy Eating Can Start Early

(NAPS)—Nearly five million American children ages 6 to 17 are overweight or obese. This excessive weight, particularly at a young age, puts them at increased risk for health problems earlier in life, such as diabetes and heart disease. Parents, however, can help keep their children on track by introducing good habits early like regular exercise and healthy eating.

“Young people need to be active and learn to eat right,” said Dennis O’Neill, MD, a pathologist in Manchester, Conn. “If children see their parents enjoying healthy foods, they are more likely to try them. Similarly, if children see their parents exercising, that will reinforce that activity is important. Parents are their children’s most important role models.”

Children’s attitudes toward exercise and eating are shaped early on and can last a lifetime. At home, parents can encourage their children to enjoy a variety of foods, especially cereals, breads, other grain products, fruits, and vegetables, as well as low-fat dairy products and lean meats.

“Young children need to develop good eating habits,” said Dr. O’Neill. “Meal times provide a good opportunity for parents to set an example by creating a positive atmosphere for healthy attitudes toward food.”

Tips for packing healthy lunches

But what about when they’re at school? An easy way for parents to make sure their children are eating healthy foods when away from home is to pack nutritious and delicious lunches.

Pathologists, physicians who



care for patients through laboratory medicine, recommend that a child’s school lunch includes at least one of each of the five food groups: breads or cereals; vegetables; fruits; milk or milk products; and meat, eggs, or fish.

“When sending some foods to school, such as sandwiches with mayonnaise, eggs, or meats, it is often a good idea to send a cold pack along,” said Dr. O’Neill. “This keeps the food fresh until lunchtime.”

Dr. O’Neill uses the following tips when packing healthy lunches for his family: “Reduce the number of foods high in saturated fat, like potato chips and red meat; limit foods high in cholesterol, such as bologna; pack low-fat treats like vanilla wafers and animal crackers; and include carrots or cut-up apples to balance it.”

Healthy lunches give kids a foundation of good eating that will help them throughout their lives, according to pathologists. Eating right also provides the nutrition kids need to learn and grow.