

Healthy Guidance

Your child's nutrition begins with you

educating yourself



When I walked into a Florida restaurant five years ago awaiting to go on a cruise with my family, my jaw dropped. My wife is always telling me to watch what I say; I can be brutally honest sometimes. What I saw shocked me and truly blew me away. At this little breakfast restaurant, at least 50% of the patrons (adults) were heavy set. What really made me sad was to see the children of these parents (Who know only what mommy and daddy tell them to eat) also looking overweight. How sad.

Our children today are the first in history who could live less time than their parents. The primary reason for this is obesity, which is linked to an assortment of ailments. Childhood and teenage obesity rates have been skyrocketing over the past three decades, and the heavier you are, the sicker you are likely to become. By the time you are an adult, you are dealing with diabetes, high blood pressure, hypertension, strokes, heart attacks and more. According to studies, 25% of North American children are now officially overweight. This is more than double what it was thirty years ago and the numbers have risen with each successive study.

What is the cause? I can certainly name a few: Fast food, candy, breakfast cereals that contain way too much sugar and almost no protein and eating only one to three big

meals a day. Certainly we need to eat better but, more importantly, we need to find a way to get our children to eat better and exercising at the same time.

Children should exercise one to two hours per day minimum. What happened to gym class and going outside to play? Insurance, lawsuits against schools and video games have taken center stage. Parents need to limit TV and computer time to two hours a day (In my opinion) and be proactive in their kids exercise and play time. Not that they have to be there the entire time doing it with them, but they need to be part of the planning of the activities, be out with their kids, and be involved with the implementation. Make this something fun!

Nutrition, of course, is important too. With fast food, high fat restaurants, on just about every corner, the opportunities to consume too many, and the wrong types of calories, are abundant. Children, like adults, need four to five small meals a day and should take in 200-400 calories per meal depending on the age and size of the child. Coupled with the fact that most schools offer low-grade foods, parents should pack their kids food to make sure they get the right kind of nutrition. I feed my two girls protein oatmeal every morning and we always pack my daughters lunches; it is as simple as that.

It is not as gloomy as it sounds though. Many of these trends can be easily reversed. In fact, with knowledge on what to avoid and by focusing a bit more on your child's physical fitness, you can pretty much assure that your child grows up strong and healthy. Here are some steps to ensure that you have healthy kids.

1. Start very young as babies, for example, no bottles before bed. In fact, no bottle at all seems like a better bet as kids that are breastfed are less likely to be obese.

2. Make your toddler move! The 60- 120 minute guideline for exercise is for school-age kids, but it's recommended that younger children get even more. Infants should be encouraged to move as much as possible because it develops motor skills that will help them throughout their life.

3. Fight for your kids to have recess. As schools' budgets dwindle because "results" are based on test scores, "optional" classes like recess are being cut. Play is exercise.

4. All kids should have chores. Just because we find child labor in the developing world appalling doesn't mean that we're bad parents if we have our child mow the lawn.

5. Get your kids involved in something, try sports for example. Not all kids are good at sports but almost everyone has an aptitude at some physical activity.

6. Lastly and most important, your kids will do what they see you do, NOT what you tell them. If you want healthy kids you have to set a healthy example for them.

I sincerely hope that this content helps parents, your children are our planets future, and you as a parent have a choice. Help your children grow up to be the best that they can be.

— ALLAN FINE

Allan H. Fine holds over 25 titles and certifications, and has trained and educated thousands of people in exercise, nutrition and a positive outlook on life for more than 18 years.