

How to help your overweight child

Your child may feel self-conscious about his or her appearance. She may be teased by classmates, which can lower the youngster's self-esteem. Being overweight can also have serious physical consequences. Overweight children are far more likely to develop diabetes, heart disease, liver disease, and orthopedic and other health problems. Your child's pediatrician will discuss with you and your child ways to control his weight by gradually making changes in diet and physical activity. Your clinician will discuss modifying unhealthful behavior patterns, such as eating meals in front of the TV. As you implement these suggestions and set specific goals, keep in mind some general parenting guidelines.

Be a good role model

Be more active and improve your own diet. Implementing the same changes your child agrees to may help motivate him to stick with the program

Remove temptations from your home

Keep only healthy snacks on hand—such as fresh fruit and low-fat popcorn. Remove chips, frozen pizza, ice cream, and the like

Offer alternatives

Let your child choose between two healthful alternatives—green beans or a salad or swimming or a walk. A child is less likely to view something she chose herself as unattractive

Follow a regular schedule for meals and snacks

This helps a child develop healthy eating habits and prevents constant eating (grazing), which can lead to overeating. Eat meals together at the family table to stimulate conversation and take the emphasis off food

Reward your child for achieving goals

Give a reward for achieving a goal, such as eating only one dessert a week. An activity, such as going to an amusement park or a show, is a good reward. Praising your child for making a healthful choice such as drinking water instead of soda with meals is itself a powerful reward. Do not use food as a reward because it sends the wrong message. Reward the child only for a change in behavior, not for losing weight