



DELAWARE MODERN PEDIATRICS, P. A.

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Nutrition, Lifestyle, and Weight Gain

Obesity and Type-II Diabetes have become epidemic in America. But the good news is that these problems are generally preventable, if attention is paid to lifestyle habits.

The lifestyle habits that parents teach and role-model for their children have immediate benefits for improved behavior and health. And children are likely to continue good habits as adults (even after they're beyond the parents' direct influence), if they are accustomed to healthy habits from an early age.

Is your child gaining too much weight now? In fact, new onset of rapid weight gain in children is generally not an immediate health risk. Is your child going to develop diabetes or hypertension next year? Probably not ... However, excess weight gain may be a "red flag" for unhealthy lifestyle habits. Families can have a dramatic influence on their children's long-term health, by using this "red flag" as an opportunity to teach healthy life habits. These habits will stay with the child, long after he has begun living on his own.

There are several easy habits that families can follow to assist in appropriate weight gain, while participating in a normal life and a regular diet. In fact, these guidelines can be healthful for all family members to follow; there is no need for one child in the family to be singled out.

1. **Exercise:** Participation in supervised vigorous activity is beneficial. Noncompetitive activities like dance or karate are just as helpful as organized competitive sports. Participation in one sport or activity in every season, year round, is a good idea. 30 to 60 minutes per session, three times per week, is a reasonable start.
2. **Juice:** Limit total juice intake to 6 ounces, perhaps only twice per week. (Juice has as much sugar as soda, ounce for ounce; think of them both as liquid candy.) Limit soda to twice a week also. New research suggests that Diet Soda may carry the same risk for Diabetes, and may also perpetuate the desire for sweet foods. Water is a better alternative. Milk is a good idea, 16-24 oz/day.

3. **Water**: Insure adequate water intake. Some kids have trouble telling the difference between hunger and thirst. So when they're thirsty, they want to eat, taking in unnecessary calories. I suggest drinking some water every hour. It may also help to drink a glass of water before each meal.
4. **Fast Food**: Limit to once per week.
5. **Television and screen time**: Limit television, recreational computer time, and video/tablet/cell phone games to ten hours per week. (The "movie ticket" system can be a relatively painless method.) No one should ever eat in front of the television; this is an important risk for obesity. If there is a TV in the bedroom, it should be removed to a public area of the house. Try to avoid any electronics after 9 pm or so; keep the charger in the kitchen overnight, not the bedroom. Computer work for school is "free," but avoid having multiple other distracting "windows" or tasks open on the screen. Turn off the "Autoplay" button on the YouTube screen (upper right corner of the screen).
6. **Snacking** can sabotage the best diet. When your child complains of hunger between meals, ask if he's actually bored instead! You can teach him to find activities other than eating when he's bored. If he insists that he's hungry, ask him to drink a glass of water first, before you offer an appropriate snack. (On the other hand, there's nothing wrong with a scheduled snack, if it's offered at the same time each day, and the food is appropriate.)
7. **Sleep habits** have an effect on attention, weight gain, and diabetes. People who are sleep-deprived tend to eat food they don't need, especially junk food, in an attempt to feel better. Ensure a regular and reasonable bedtime, even on weekends and vacation. Ban TV and cell phones from the bedroom. If the child awakens at night, she can have water or milk, but she shouldn't eat after bedtime. She may read or listen to music, but she shouldn't watch TV, or use the cell phone or computer. (If a child has a persistent problem being awake for more than 20 minutes at night, please consult us.)
8. It is helpful to have the **whole family** participate in the eating and exercise routines. However, don't use the bathroom scale too frequently; emphasize healthy life habits, rather than focusing on the numbers and the pounds.
9. At times, families may feel at a loss to explain one child's rapid change in weight. Consider consulting the **Weight Management specialists** at DuPont Hospital (302-651-6040) if the weight gain doesn't slow.

Remember: the goal is to give children the sense that they have **control** over their own bodies, rather than feeling out of control of the changes their bodies undergo. If you continue to be concerned about your child's growth, please discuss it with us.