



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE 07-25-11

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Childhood obesity on the rise-break the cycle

Stanton- It should come as no surprise that children and adolescents often favor fast food, spend hours on end playing video games, and often have to be forced outside in an attempt to engage them in some form of physical activity.

What may come as a surprise is that since 1980, obesity among children and adolescents has more than tripled and that nearly one in three children are considered overweight or obese.

Sadly, these new trends may have life-long consequences. Overweight and obese youth are more likely to have risk factors for cardiovascular disease, such as high cholesterol or high blood pressure. They are also at greater risk for bone and joint problems, sleep apnea, and social and psychological problems. Furthermore, obesity in youth often continues into adulthood, putting them more at risk for heart disease, type 2 diabetes, stroke, several types of cancer, and more.

So what can you do to break or reverse the cycle?

Balance Calories

Healthy lifestyle habits, including healthy eating, can lower the risk of becoming obese and developing related diseases. Mothers can start their children off right by eating well during pregnancy and breastfeeding. Other ways to help your children develop healthy eating habits include:

- Provide plenty of fruits, vegetables and whole grain products
- Choose low-fat or non-fat dairy products
- Choose lean meats, lentils, beans, poultry and fish
- Serve low-fat and low-sugar treats, such as fruit, vegetables, yogurt, etc.
- Serve reasonably-sized portions
- Encourage children to drink lots of water
- Limit sugar-sweetened beverages
- Limit consumption of sugar and saturated fat
- Avoid watching television while eating. Instead, eat together at the dinner table
- Avoid forcing your child to eat if he/she is not hungry
- Limit the frequency of fast-food eating to no more than once per week
- Avoid using food as a reward or the lack of food as a punishment
- Look for ways to make favorite dishes healthier

Help kids stay active

Making sure your child receives an adequate amount of physical exercise is a critical step in combating childhood obesity. Children should get 60 minutes or more of moderate intensity physical activity daily, but studies show that the average child and adolescent in America today gets less than 15 minutes of vigorous activity a day. When it comes to physical activity, remember that children imitate adults. Start

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adding physical activity to your own daily routine and encourage your child to join you. Some examples of moderate intensity physical activity the whole family can enjoy include brisk walking, playing soccer, rollerblading, hiking and swimming. In addition to being fun, regular activity has many other health benefits, including:

- Strengthening bones
- Decreasing blood pressure
- Reducing stress and anxiety
- Increasing self-esteem
- Helping with weight management

Reduce sedentary time

Don't forget to limit the amount of time your kids watch television, play video games or surf the web to no more than two hours per day.

Helping your children balance calories, encouraging them to stay active, and ensuring that they reduce and limit sedentary time will not only stop or reverse the cycle of obesity, but will also put them on the road to a healthy lifestyle.

For more information and tools regarding healthy eating habits, visit www.choosemyplate.gov.

Mid-Michigan District Health Department serves the residents of Clinton, Gratiot and Montcalm Counties.

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