

A decorative border of black and white line art surrounds the central text. It features stylized flowers, leaves, and swirling vines. The top and bottom sections are particularly dense with floral motifs.

# Mothering Matters

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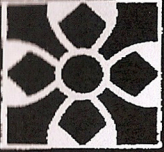
Parenting in Switzerland

A dark, textured rectangular box with a slightly irregular, hand-drawn appearance. It contains the text 'FAMILY HEALTH' in white, serif, all-caps font.

FAMILY HEALTH

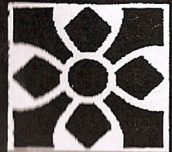
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## HEALTHY WEIGHT HEALTHY CHILDREN

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**P**reventing childhood obesity is becoming more and more of a challenge for parents and for our society in general. Obesity in children is four times higher today than 30<sup>r</sup> years ago. According to a recent ETH study, nearly 13% of Swiss school age children are overweight, while 6% of boys and 4% of girls are obese. This means 19% of boys and 17% of girls are either overweight or obese. (Source: Isabelle Aeberli, et al., "Stabilisation of the Prevalence of Childhood Obesity in Switzerland," *Swiss Medical Weekly*, March 2010.)

### Why is child obesity such an issue?

Childhood obesity is associated with numerous health and social consequences and increases a child's chances of becoming an obese adult. Scientists and health practitioners are increasingly concerned about the rise of obesity in children because obesity may lead to heart disease caused by high cholesterol and/or high blood pressure.

There are also less common health conditions associated with increased weight, including: asthma, hepatic steatosis, sleep apnea and type 2 diabetes.

❖ Asthma is a disease of the lungs in which the airways become blocked or narrowed causing breathing difficulty. More and more research has identified a link between childhood obesity and asthma.

- ❖ Hepatic steatosis is the fatty degeneration of the liver caused by a high concentration of liver enzymes. Weight reduction causes liver enzymes to normalize.
- ❖ Sleep apnea is a less common complication for overweight children. This is a sleep-associated breathing disorder defined as the cessation of breathing during sleep that lasts for at least 10 seconds. Sleep apnea is characterized by loud snoring and labored breathing. During sleep apnea, oxygen levels in the blood can fall dramatically.
- ❖ Type 2 diabetes is increasingly being reported among children and adolescents who are overweight. Although diabetes and glucose intolerance (which is a precursor of diabetes) are common health effects of adult obesity, only recently has type 2 diabetes begun to emerge as a health-related problem among children. The onset of diabetes in children and adolescents can result in advanced complications such as cardiovascular disease and kidney failure.

Thus obese children may experience immediate health consequences and be at risk for weight-related health problems in adulthood.

The consequences of childhood weight issues can also be psychosocial, mainly because obese children are targets of early and

systematic social discrimination. The psychological stress of social stigmatization may easily lead to low self-esteem which, in turn, can hinder academic and social functioning into adulthood.

### What can parents do to help prevent their children being overweight?

To help children maintain a healthy weight, balance the calories your child consumes from foods and beverages with the calories your child uses through physical activity and normal growth.

The main aim for overweight and obese children is to reduce the rate of weight gain while allowing normal growth and development. Children should NOT be placed on a weight reduction diet without the consultation of a health care provider.

One part of balancing calories is to offer foods that provide adequate nutrition and an appropriate number of calories. Parents can help children learn to be aware of what they eat by regularly encouraging them to develop healthy eating habits, role modeling healthy habits, looking for ways to make favorite dishes healthier and reducing calorie-rich temptations.

There's no great secret to healthy eating. To help your children and family develop healthy eating habits:

- ❖ Provide plenty of vegetables, fruits, and whole-grain products.
- ❖ Include low-fat or non-fat milk or dairy products.
- ❖ Choose lean meats, poultry, fish, lentils, and beans for protein.
- ❖ Serve reasonably sized portions.
- ❖ Encourage your family to drink lots of water.



- ❖ Limit sugar-sweetened beverages.
- ❖ Limit consumption of sugar and saturated fat.

As parents, keep in mind that small changes every day can lead to a recipe for success; so do be persistent.

### Make favorite dishes healthier and eliminate calorie-rich temptations

Although everything can be enjoyed in moderation, reducing the calorie-rich temptations of high-fat, high-sugar or salty snacks can also help your children develop healthy eating habits. Try only allowing children to eat them sometimes, so that they truly will be treats. Here are examples of easy-to-prepare, low-fat and low-sugar treats that are 100 calories or less:

- ❖ 1 medium-size apple
- ❖ 1 medium-size banana
- ❖ 1 cup blueberries
- ❖ 1 cup grapes
- ❖ 1 cup carrots, broccoli, or bell peppers with 2 Tbs hummus

A healthy eating plan that helps you manage your family's weight should include a variety of foods you may not have considered. If "healthy eating" makes you think about the foods you **can't** have, try refocusing on all the new foods you **can** eat.

- ❖ **Fresh fruits** – Try some "exotic" fruits too. How about a mango? Or offer a juicy pineapple or kiwi fruit! When your favorite fresh fruits aren't in season, try a frozen, canned or dried variety of a fresh fruit you enjoy. One caution about canned fruits is that they may contain added sugars or syrups. Be sure to choose canned varieties of fruit packed in water or in their own juice.
- ❖ **Fresh vegetables** – Prepare grilled vegetables or steamed vegetables with a herb you haven't tried like rosemary. You can sauté vegetables in a non-stick pan

with a small amount of cooking spray. Or try frozen or canned vegetables for a quick side dish – just microwave and serve.

- ❖ **Calcium-rich foods** – You may automatically think of a glass of low-fat or fat-free milk when someone says "eat more dairy products." But what about low-fat and fat-free yogurts without added sugars? These come in a wide variety of flavors and can be a great dessert substitute for those with a sweet tooth.
- ❖ **A new twist on an old favorite** – If your favorite recipe calls for frying fish or breaded chicken, try healthier variations using baking or grilling. Maybe even try a recipe that uses dry beans in place of higher-fat meats. Ask around or search the Internet and magazines for recipes with fewer calories.



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## Let's get physical

Another part of balancing calories is to engage in an appropriate amount of physical activity and avoid too much sedentary time. Regular physical activity also has many other health benefits, including: strengthening bones, decreasing blood pressure, reducing stress and anxiety, increasing self-esteem and helping with weight management.

Children and teens should participate in at least 60 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity most days of the week, preferably daily. Remember that children imitate adults. Start adding physical activity to your own daily routine and encourage your child to join you.

Some examples of moderate intensity physical activity include: brisk walking, playing tag, jumping rope, swimming, dancing and playing football/tennis/or whatever sport they enjoy. Every child is good at something different, so expose your children to a variety of sports and games to find out what they like. Participate in these activities with them. Supporting your children will help them to stick with any activities they participate in.

Also help children avoid too much sedentary time. Naturally quiet time for reading and homework is necessary; however, limit the time your children watch television, play video games, or surf the web to no more than two hours per day. Additionally, television viewing for children age two or younger is not recommended. As an alternative, encourage children to find fun and vigorous activities to do, with or without family members.

## Other tips to remember

Give praise and encouragement consistently and frequently. Many children with weight issues have self-esteem problems. Building children's self-worth ensures that they care enough about themselves to put effort into maintaining a healthy weight.

Lead by example. A parent who eats well and exercises is more likely to have a child who eats well and exercises. Make it a family affair. A child may resent having a special menu while everyone else in the family enjoys his favorite unhealthy foods! †

## Group Workshops



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