



Food Restriction to Control Childhood Obesity?

A newsletter about a healthier alternative for weight control in children. #healthyfood

By: Alana McLean

Historically, humans gain weight as a means of survival in cases where there were food shortages. Presently, extra body weight in childhood can have lasting negative effects on the body and is a risk factor for chronic diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular, and some cancers in adulthood. Therefore, “rapid increases in childhood obesity, and the strong relationship between early rapid growth and subsequent obesity, have focused attention on early prevention” (Taylor Et. al).

The prevalence of obesity was 8.9% among 2- to 5-year-olds compared with 17.5% of 6- to 11-year-olds and 20.5% of 12- to 19-year-olds from 2011-2014 (CDC). Childhood obesity is also more common among certain populations. Data from the CDC also stated in 2014, 14.5% of the WIC participants aged 2 to 4 years of age had obesity. Since childhood obesity can be a potential problem in the future, is it wise to restrict food intake in children to control obesity? There are many suggestions about how to reduce childhood obesity. One very important question asked by many parents is whether or not they should reduce the amount of food they give to their children in order for them to lose weight.

For many years, scientists have been researching potential methods that can assist parents in reducing or preventing obesity in children. Studies have strongly suggest that nutritious foods, good eating habits, and regular physical activity are important ways to help control or prevent childhood obesity. Therefore, more emphasis should be placed on healthier eating and regular exercise to control weight, and not on weight loss by restricting food intake. Providing healthy foods for children is much better than focusing on restricting food intake. A new policy statement, from the American Academy of Pediatrics urges schools and families to take a wider approach to

nutrition, considering children's whole diet pattern rather than the amount of sugar, fat or specific nutrients in individual foods.

FOOD IS NOT THE ENEMY

Dieting or food restriction can be hazardous for children which can prevent them from sustaining normal growth, slow development, mental functioning and reproductive capacity. A review article by Mallick, concluded that results of a variety of studies on the health hazards of weight control by food restriction in children and adolescents suggest that strategies such as food restriction may have negative effects on health in young persons. In another study by Heald and Hunt, three adolescent boys who were given a calorie-restricted diet had a negative nitrogen balance compared to one mature adolescent girl who were also given the same calorie-restricted diet.

CHILDREN'S SELF-REGULATION IN EATING

A growing body of research is investigating the relationship between obesity and children's self-regulation in eating. One study have shown that when parents believe that their children can self-regulate their eating habits the need for food restriction practices is reduced. However, children have to be taught from an early age how to control their eating habits from their parents because restriction can compromise early self-regulatory abilities. Many young children can self-regulate their eating by using internal signals to decide the amount to consume based on energy needs, but individual differences exist (Tan Et al). Nevertheless, this body of research is controversial and is yet to examine if restrictive-feeding is related to children's regulation in eating or if it's an inhibitory ability that they possess, and if it can lead to potential problems such as anorexia or bulimia. This is also important to understand the link between childhood obesity and to introduce proper interventions.

GUIDELINES TO HELP CONTROL CHILDHOOD OBESITY:

- Select a mixture of foods from the five food groups including lean cuts of meat, grains, low-fat dairy, fruits, and vegetables
- Prepare more home-cooked meals
- Add limited sugar and salt to food

- Offer appropriate portions
- Make healthier snacks more available
- Involve children in shopping for groceries and preparing meals
- Be a role model by choosing healthier foods
- Regular physical exercise (60 minutes of moderate intensity daily) can help to control weight

References

1. "AAP-Recommend-Whole-Diet-Approach-to-Children's-Nutrition." *Site* *Title*
www.aap.org/en-us/about-the-aap/aap-press-room/Pages/AAP-Recommend-Whole-Diet-Approach-to-Children%27s-Nutrition.aspx.
2. Taylor, Barry J., et al. "Targeting Sleep, Food, and Activity in Infants for Obesity Prevention: An RCT." *Pediatrics*, vol. 139, no. 3, 2017, doi:10.1542/peds.2016-2037.
3. Mallick, M J. "Health hazards of obesity and weight control in children: a review of the literature." *American Journal of Public Health*, vol. 73, no. 1, 1983, pp. 78–82., doi:10.2105/ajph.73.1.78.
4. Lytle, Leslie A. "In Defense of a Low-Fat Diet for Healthy Children." *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, vol. 100, no. 1, 2000, pp. 39–41., doi:10.1016/s0002-8223(00)00016-x.
5. Heald, Felix P., and Sara M. Hunt. "Caloric dependency in obese adolescents as affected by degree of maturation." *The Journal of Pediatrics*, vol. 66, no. 6, 1965, pp. 1035–1041., doi:10.1016/s0022-3476(65)80089-0.
6. Tan, C. C., and S. C. Holub. "Childrens Self-Regulation in Eating: Associations with Inhibitory Control and Parents Feeding Behavior." *Journal of Pediatric Psychology*, vol. 36, no. 3, May 2010, pp. 340–345., doi:10.1093/jpepsy/jsq089.
7. "Childhood Obesity Facts." *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 10 Apr. 2017, www.cdc.gov/obesity/data/childhood.html.