

**I**T is important to determine if your child's rate of growth is reflective of a problem. Ask your paediatrician to examine the pattern of your child's growth (height vs. weight). If your child's rate of weight gain is proportionally higher than her height increase, there may be an increased risk of obesity.

It is also possible that your child, while meeting criteria for "overweight", is not at risk for adult overweight or obesity. Sometimes children got through periods of having excess body fat (e.g., premenarche). The most important factor is your family lifestyle. Creating and maintaining an environment for your child that consists of mostly healthful food, physical activity every day, and very little sedentary behaviour (TV, video games and computer time) is the most effective way to prevent obesity in adolescence and adulthood. These are the habits that your child will maintain for a lifetime.

It is very important to redefine the problem of an overweight child as a family problem. Instead of trying to change your child's weight, try to change the family environment.

\* Realise that even if the rest of the family is slim, nobody benefits by eating "junk". Replace unhealthy foods with nutritious fare.

\* Don't put your child on a diet. At best, diets produce short-term results, but over the long-term are not effective. It is far more beneficial to establish and maintain a lifestyle that supports good health.

\* Practice what you preach. Research shows that our children imitate our behaviour. "Model" healthy living.

\* Don't express a desire for your children to be thin; instead, express the importance of being healthy. Praise health-oriented behaviour (such as participation in physical activity), not weight loss. Teach children to feel good about what their bodies can do, not what they look like.

Most people eat past the point of satiety. Satiety is the "just right" amount of food: the point at which your body is no longer hungry, but not "full". Satiety is a subtle, quiet signal. If you are eating in a distracted manner, you won't notice this signal. Here are some ways to hear the "Quiet Message":

1. One room should be designated for eating. Don't allow eating in front of the tv, in bedrooms, etc.
2. Eat sitting down, with no distractions other than family interactions.
3. Eat as a family, with designated mealtimes.

#### Make Healthful Choices

- \* Make fast-food meals (including frozen dinners) a rare occasion.
- \* If your schedule does not allow for cooking, consider hiring a cook.
- \* Get the whole family involved in meal-preparation.



## How to Help Your Overweight Child



(e.g., tearing lettuce for salad. Again, this is a way to "model" healthy living.

\* Eliminate sodas and juices. These have no nutritional value, and are extremely high in calories. Use water to quench thirst. After age 2, offer low fat and skim milk.

\* "Low-fat" snacks and desserts are usually as calorie-dense as their "regular fat" counterparts. Keep "whole" food snacks on hand, such as nuts, seeds and fruit. Whole-fruit popsicles are a good dessert choice, and kids love them.

\* Never use food as a reward or comfort. As much as possible, food should be treated as value-neutral.

\* While keeping the above in mind, allow for the occasional treat. Don't exclude your child from households or