Three Routines Help Kids’ Weight

Preschool-aged children with three routines in the household—eating dinner with the family, getting enough sleep, and limiting time in front of a TV or computer screen—have a 40% less risk of obesity, study shows.

Routine #1: Dinner as a Family
Making time for family meals has many benefits. Family meals usually have 1) more vegetables and fruit, 2) less fried food and soda, and 3) more vitamins and fiber—this means more nutrition and fewer foods that can cause weight gain. Dinner as a family can be an opportunity for children to observe adults making healthy choices and to try new foods. Be a good example and children will naturally follow.

When dealing with picky eaters, the feeding “division of responsibility” is good to keep in mind. Parents or caregivers are responsible for WHAT is served and WHEN it is served. Children are responsible for deciding IF they will eat and HOW MUCH they will eat.

Routine #2: Adequate Sleep
Not getting enough sleep in childhood may increase risk for obesity later in life. Children benefit from a routine of 10.5 hours or more of nighttime sleep. Both the quality of sleep (ie deep, restful sleep) and number of hours of total sleep are very important to healthy body functioning.

Routine #3: Less Screen Time
Children should spend no more than 2 hours per day in front of a TV or computer screen. When children substitute TV/video viewing for physical activity, watch a lot of advertisements for unhealthy foods, and snack in front of a screen, weight gain can occur. Usually if parents set time limits on screen time and stick to them, kids spend less time in this activity.
Limiting Screen Time Helps More than Just Weight

Children who spend too much time indoors in front of a screen may be missing opportunities to be outside. This means less physical activity for growth and development, and less exposure to sunlight for vitamin D.

Experts are seeing more vitamin D deficiency and bone diseases in infants and children. Some possible reasons:

- More time spent indoors
- High use of sunscreen so skin cannot make Vitamin D naturally
- Many children have poor diets and do not consume enough food sources of vitamin D like fortified dairy products
- Children, especially teens, may substitute soft drinks for milk at a time when bones are developing
- Breast milk often has low levels of vitamin D
- Dark-skinned individuals don’t absorb sunlight as easily and are more prone to vitamin D deficiency

It is now recommended that all infants and children have a minimum daily intake of 400 IU of vitamin D beginning soon after birth, either from fortified dairy and other foods or by supplement.

Recipe
Tuna Macaroni Salad

1 cup whole wheat macaroni, uncooked
3/4 cup shredded carrots
3/4 cup chopped celery
Two 6-ounce cans tuna, drained
2 hard-cooked eggs, chopped (optional)
1/3 cup light mayonnaise
2 tablespoons minced onion
1/4 teaspoon black pepper

Directions:
1. Boil a small pot of water. Add macaroni and cook until tender, about 8 minutes. Drain.
2. While macaroni is cooking, wash and prepare the carrots and celery.
3. In a large bowl, combine the cooked macaroni, carrots, celery, tuna, and eggs if using.
4. In a small bowl, stir together the mayonnaise, onion, and pepper to make the dressing.
5. Add dressing to macaroni mixture and mix well. Chill until ready to serve.

Makes six (3/4 cup) servings; 210 calories each

Jumping for joy is good exercise. ~Author Unknown

This material was funded by USDA's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program – SNAP. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) provides nutrition assistance to people with low income. It can help you buy nutritious foods for a better diet. To find out more, contact your local DHS office, or call the URI SNAP-Ed nutrition program at 1-877-Food-URI (1-877-366-3874). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.