



With kids, forget 'weighty' discussion

Like me, my children are overweight. I'm having trouble figuring out how to talk with them about it. What's the best approach?

A lot of people get nervous about how to discuss weight issues with their kids. In fact, a 2011 survey conducted by Sanford Health and WebMD found that parents felt more uncomfortable talking about weight than they did about alcohol, sex, drugs or smoking.

There's probably good reason for this. A 2013 study published in *JAMA Pediatrics* revealed that if such conversation isn't handled properly, things can turn sour. Researchers concluded that, with adolescents, at least, focusing on weight and size led to more binge eating and other unhealthy weight-control behaviors. On the other hand, focusing on health and on being a positive role model, not on the child's need to lose weight, tended to be more successful.

Some parents get nervous because they think they have to have "the talk" about weight. But, unless your child brings it up, a more subtle approach is probably best. Talk about what you're doing to eat more healthfully and become more active, and then do it.

Be careful you don't become the "diet police." You're on your child's team. You can help by removing temptations and offering alternatives: Instead of chips and cookies, buy a lot of fruit. Eat meals as a family and serve more vegetables. Limit screen time and plan some physical activity

the family can enjoy together. Making small changes over time is better than trying to do everything all at once.

Some resources that offer additional practical guidance include:

- "Weigh In: Talking to Your Children About Weight and Health." This guide for parents of kids ages 7-11 is produced by the STOP Obesity Alliance and the Alliance for a Healthier Generation. It includes situations you might encounter and how to prepare for them. It's available to download at bit.ly/UPennWeighIn.

- "We Can! Families Finding the Balance: A Parent Handbook," from the National Institutes of Health. This 32-page booklet focuses on children ages 8-13 and is available at www.nhlbi.nih.gov/files/docs/public/heart/parent_hb_en.pdf.

- Raising Fit Kids. Available at webmd.com/parenting/raising-fit-kids/, this website is produced by WebMD and Sanford Health and focuses on how parents can help their kids take a holistic, healthy approach to food, activity, rest and emotional health. The parent resources can be used together with related interactive materials (fit.webmd.com) for children and teens: Fit Junior for ages 2-7; Fit Kids for ages 8-12; and Fit Teens for ages 13-18.

Chow Line is a service of Ohio State University's College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences and its outreach and research arms, Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH, 43210-1043, or filipic.3@osu.edu.



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Aug. 1, 2014

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Editor:

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