

Helping Your Child Lose Weight

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You may have noticed your child is overweight, or maybe your child's pediatrician recommended they lose some weight. Or maybe you just want your child to be healthier. No matter what the reason may be, you know you want your child to be happy and healthy.

According to a 2018 study from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), childhood obesity affects about 14.4 million kids and teenagers between the ages of 2 and 19. If your child weighs more than what's recommended by their doctor, it's important to get them back on the right track.

You can do a lot as a parent or caregiver to help your child lose weight. And the best part? You don't have to do it alone.

Your child's pediatrician is an expert you can trust. They'll be able to tell you if your child needs to lose weight, how much weight they should lose and how to do it safely.

Asma Khan, DO, a pediatrician at OSF HealthCare, offered some insight so you and your child can get started on the weight loss journey.

Start with diet

“Start with a healthy diet. It’s usually in diet where you have the most ability to make a positive difference and where a change is most needed,” said Dr. Khan.

In addition to some helpful guidelines the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has published on the topic, Dr. Khan recommends keeping a few things in mind when creating a diet plan for your child:

- Don’t let them overeat
- Cut out the unhealthy snacks
- Don’t keep junk food in the house
- Fill up on fruits and vegetables

“It’s important not to put your child on any kind of trendy diet. Having a healthy balance of fruits, vegetables, protein, vitamins and whole grains is the key,” Dr. Khan said.

Staying hydrated also helps keep kids’ bodies, minds and immune systems in top shape. That means drinking plenty of water and cutting out soda and other sugary drinks.

Ways to get moving

Dr. Khan also suggests that the entire family get active together.

“Make lifestyle changes together as a family, not as an individual. Kids will want to do what the grown-ups are doing.”

Anything to get kids moving is good for their physical and mental well-being. Some options include:

- Go for a bike ride with your child once a week.
- Create an indoor obstacle course.
- Introduce your kids to games you loved to play at recess when you were little.
- Compete to see who can pick up sticks from the yard fastest.

Another way to get kids moving is to use their favorite activities to form some healthy habits. You probably often hear advice from experts to limit your child’s screen time. That is certainly good advice, but if cutting out screen time is too big of a challenge to begin with, try using screen time for good instead. There are plenty of apps that can be used to educate kids on healthy eating and other positive topics.

“Kids respond better to change when they know what’s coming, when and why,” Dr. Khan said.

The more kids know about healthy eating, the more they’ll feel empowered to know why it’s good to eat healthy and what they get out of it. There are also apps that encourage kids to get up and moving. A quick web search will help you find loads of fun fitness apps and websites for kids.

“No matter what choices you make to help your child lose weight, be sure to consult with their pediatrician all along the way,” Dr. Khan concluded.