



“Cradle to Table Nutrition for Early Years Learning”

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Childhood Obesity

Obesity is increasingly prevalent in children all over the world.

Obesity was top of the agenda in the recent White Paper on public health, with a drive to ensure that children have the healthiest possible start and that advertising, promotion and sponsorship of unhealthy food and drinks are better controlled.

Over the past 10 years obesity has become the most common disorder of metabolism in childhood. 700,000 children in the UK are obese and 1.8 million, 2 to 15 year olds are classed as overweight.

Many overweight children become overweight adults – a 40- 70 % chance. The consequences of childhood obesity are:

- insulin resistance and glucose intolerance (type 2 Diabetes),
- gynaecological and respiratory disorders (asthma). and
- psychological complications.

On top of the medical consequences, overweight and obese children are also the targets for bullying and generally have low self-esteem.

The causes of childhood obesity are even more complicated than adult obesity.

Genetic and endocrine (hormonal) conditions are rarely detected and are highly unlikely to be the cause.

The great majority of children have ‘simple’ obesity resulting from excess of energy intake versus energy expenditure over a long period of time. There is an abundance of palatable, convenient, energy-dense food; these empty calorie foods are high in fat and sugar. Studies suggest that the total calorie intake of children has not changed significantly for a number of years, proving that the other main cause of obesity is the lack of physical activity. Half of boys and 2/3 of girls between 7 – 16 fail to do the hour exercise a day, as recommended by the World Health Organisation.

Obesity often runs in families, if parents are obese it doubles the risk of adult obesity among both obese and non-obese children less than 10 years of age. Despite all the warnings our children are becoming more overweight by the year. If we as adults struggle to lose weight, how can we expect children to overcome this problem?

There are only a few weight-loss programmes for obese children. We know fad diets are not appropriate for growing children.

Prevention is always better than cure.

Let’s hope that the increased awareness, all the different initiatives, policies and guidelines lead to a healthier youth. Children should be allowed to be children, eating sweets, chocolates and crisps are perfectly normal, when eaten as part of a healthy diet. A healthy diet, plenty of physical activity and good parental support is essential. A diet based on high calorie snacks, processed food and plenty of ready-made meals will never be acceptable.

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