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## **CHILDHOOD OBESITY – A GLOBAL PROBLEM**

The waistline of America's children seems to be growing. Is this a problem unique to the United States?

The International Food Information Council indicates the trend is worldwide and includes countries as diverse as Japan, Brazil, Western Samoa, and Japan. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), seven percent of the adult population is overweight or obese!

In the United States 25 percent of children ages 2 to 20 are at risk of becoming overweight. This is twice the rate of obesity a decade ago. Overweight children tend to become overweight adults.

This trend is seen in other countries. Who would guess that a developing country facing problems of hunger and malnutrition would also be plagued with obesity and overnutrition. This can be seen in India where the majority of the people are undernourished, yet a growing sector of wealthy are becoming obese. Shanghai, China has experienced a six-fold increase in childhood obesity in the last 10 years.

The problem – more “calories-in” than “calories-out”, in addition to the complex social factors that influence how children eat, exercise, and play.

Are any of your children overweight? Consider these suggestions offered by the University of California Cooperative Extension.

***Should I limit the amount of food my child eats?*** No. You should not feel you have to withhold food from your child in order to help your child lose weight. Restricting food can hurt rather than help. When a child is forced to go hungry, he/she becomes preoccupied with food. All children should be encouraged to learn to eat until **just** satisfied and when it's time to stop eating. Children should not be forced to “clean their plates”. This encourages overeating.

***Should I put my child on a low-calorie diet?*** No, not unless your child's doctor feels it is necessary. Low-calorie diets can endanger normal growth. Even though your child may not need to gain weight, he/she will still be growing taller. A low-calorie diet may hamper this growth

***What kinds of meals and snacks are best for my child?*** Have regular meals and planned snacks as part of your family's routine. Irregular meals and uncontrolled snacking can lead to weight problems. A routine helps children to regulate their food intake. This also helps children feel secure about being fed. They don't need to worry about being deprived of food.

Select foods that are rich in nutrients and moderate in calories. This is the same kind of food the entire family should be eating. There is no reason to put an overweight child on a “special” diet containing different foods from what the rest of the family eats.

***What should I do about social situations like birthday parties, where my child is going to be served high-calorie foods?*** Allow your child to take part fully, even though the child may eat more than usual. Your child should not be punished or set aside in any way because he/she is overweight.

At first, your child may overeat at parties. However, after your child realizes that no one is going to stop him/her from eating, there is less reason to overeat.

***How can I help my child become more active?*** Children need to run, jump, hop, and move. Think of ways that tempt your child to do this. Consider your mover. Consider having your child join an organized sports team or take classes in karate, gymnastics, or swimming. Visit local parks to use the playground equipment. Perhaps the best thing you can do is to become active with your child. Set an example. Together go for a walk, a bike ride or roller blading. Have your child go with you to the health club or the swimming pool.

Want more ideas? Call Skagit/WSU Cooperative Extension (428-4270) and request, “If My Child Is Too Fat, What Should I do About It?” (publication number 21455). The cost is \$2.00.

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