

Making Sense of Body Image for Kids - Tips for Parents

Bodies come in many shapes and sizes. As children grow and their bodies begin to change, they often become concerned with their body image. Children who feel good about their bodies generally have high self-esteem and enjoy life more.

Every Person is Unique

Parents and caregivers can foster development of healthy body images by helping kids understand that every person is unique and there is no perfect body size or shape. Kids often compare their own bodies to those of their friends and siblings, or to celebrities such as models or professional athletes. Encourage kids to look at the different body shapes of healthy, active people they know or see on television. Point out that you don't need to have a perfect body to be good at what you do or to be valued and accepted by others.

Growing Up

Kids may wonder when they will start (or stop) growing and how their bodies will develop and change. Although you cannot predict how tall a child will be or the shape and size of his or her body, you can explain that these traits depend on each person's genes. To get an idea of how and when their bodies may develop, encourage kids to look at parents and other family members, such as aunts, uncles, grandparents and cousins. Chances are their bodies may follow a similar pattern of growth and development. Girls often start their growth spurt early in their teen years, and it usually lasts for about three years. Boys start their growth spurt somewhat later, usually closer to the middle of their teen years, and continue to grow for four to six years.

Body Image and a Healthy Lifestyle

Although a child's body shape and size is determined by his or her genetic make-up, lifestyle also plays an important role. Eating right and being active are key factors for helping kids develop a healthy and fit body.

- **Growing bodies need good nutrition.** Help kids learn that nutritious food can be both fun and tasty. Have a healthy selection of foods available and let kids make choices. It's especially important for kids to get recommended amounts of



Farmers' Market Chicken and Pasta Salad

calcium, which helps build strong bones. Choosing at least 3 daily servings of lower-fat milk and other calcium-rich dairy foods puts kids well on the way to meeting their calcium goals.

- **Physical activity fosters wellness.** Encourage kids to be physically active (e.g., walk, bike, do chores, play sports) for at least an hour every day. Active kids tend to appreciate what their bodies can do and feel better in their own skin. Physical activity also helps build strong muscles and bones.

'Feel Good' Strategies

Parents and caregivers play an important role in helping children feel good about themselves—and their bodies. Here are some

tips to help foster healthy body image in a child:

- **Accept.** Accept children for who they are, regardless of their body shape or size. Don't make your love or acceptance dependent on their appearance, or on their efforts to change their appearance through diet or physical activity.
- **Be positive.** Give positive, specific feedback. Rather than highlighting negative outcomes or behaviors, emphasize a child's positive actions, such as choosing a healthy snack or playing outside instead of watching TV. This will encourage a child to make a good choice next time.
- **Encourage.** Focus on a child's assets and strengths. This helps develop confidence and feelings of self-worth.
- **Respect.** Be a role model and show respect for your child and for others. Children who respect differences in others tend to have more respect for themselves.
- **Reinforce.** Recognize children's efforts to take care of their bodies by eating right and being active. Offer praise for efforts and improvements, not just for accomplishments.
- **Participate.** Involve your children in activities that promote healthy eating and regular physical activity. For example, involve children in meal planning, food shopping and meal preparation. Also, be active as a family—walk to errands together, do yard work as a team and encourage family activities such as hiking, biking and shooting hoops.

When to Seek Professional Help

If your child seems to have an unrealistic idea of an ideal body shape and uses unhealthy tactics, such as extreme diets or exercise, to try to change his or her body, ask your child's doctor for a referral to a registered dietitian or psychologist who specializes in

children's issues. These professionals can help a child learn tactics for developing a healthy body—and a healthy body image. If you think your child is overweight or underweight, talk to a doctor or registered dietitian to find out a healthy weight range for your child based on age and height.

Help kids learn to eat healthfully by offering a variety of wholesome foods, including plenty of whole grains, vegetables and fruits, for meals and snacks. Try these recipes and see how good healthy living ideas can taste.

Farmers' Market Chicken and Pasta Salad

Prep: 25 min.

- 2 cups rotini pasta, uncooked
- 1 cup fresh broccoli florets
- 1 lb. boneless skinless chicken breasts, cooked, chopped
- 1 cup carrot slices
- 1 cup halved cherry tomatoes
- 1 cup yellow squash slices
- 1/2 cup KRAFT LIGHT DONE RIGHT!
Ranch Reduced Fat Dressing

COOK rotini as directed on package, adding broccoli to the cooking water for the last 2 minutes of the pasta cooking time. Drain well.

PLACE rotini mixture in large bowl. Add chicken and remaining vegetables; mix lightly.

ADD dressing; toss to coat. Serve immediately or cover and refrigerate until ready to serve.

Makes 4 servings, about 2 cups each.

Nutrition Bonus:

This delicious meal includes foods from three different food groups and is an easy way to add a serving of veggies. The carrots are rich in vitamin A and the combination of vegetables provides vitamin C.

Nutrition Information Per Serving: 400 calories, 8g total fat, 1.5g saturated fat, 75mg cholesterol, 460mg sodium, 48g carbohydrate, 4g dietary fiber, 7g sugars, 32g protein, 100%DV vitamin A, 50%DV vitamin C, 6%DV calcium, 15%DV iron.

Exchange: 3 Starch, 1 Vegetable, 3 Meat (L)

Dietary Exchanges based on *Choose Your Foods: Exchange Lists for Diabetes* © 2008 by the American Diabetes Association and the American Dietetic Association.

Grilled Steak Salad

Prep: 15 min. **Grill:** 14 min.

- 1 beef sirloin steak (12 oz.), 1/2 to 3/4 inch thick
- 8 cups torn romaine lettuce
- 2 medium red and yellow peppers, sliced
- 1 large tomato, cut into wedges
- 1/2 cup KRAFT LIGHT DONE RIGHT!
Italian Reduced Fat Dressing

PREHEAT grill to medium-hot. Grill steak 5 to 7 minutes on each side or until cooked through. Remove from grill; cover loosely with foil. Let stand 5 minutes.

MEANWHILE, toss lettuce with peppers and tomato in large salad bowl.

CUT steak across the grain into thin slices. Add to salad along with dressing; mix lightly.

Makes 4 servings, about 3 cups each.

Nutrition Bonus:

Fire up the grill! Sliced steak and vegetables are tossed together to make a meal the whole family can enjoy. It's also rich in vitamin A from the romaine lettuce and vitamin C from the red and yellow peppers.

Nutrition Information Per Serving (about 3 cups): 200 calories, 8g total fat, 2g saturated fat, 45mg cholesterol, 320mg sodium, 16g carbohydrate, 5g dietary fiber, 9g sugars, 19g protein, 180%DV vitamin A, 460%DV vitamin C, 6%DV calcium, 20%DV iron.

Exchange: 3 Vegetable, 2 Meat (L), 1 Fat

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