Childhood Obesity in New Jersey: How Are We Doing?

Good and Not So Good News

According to the report “F as in Fat 2009”, a gathering of 2006-2008 data from sources including the US Center’s for Disease Control (CDC) and the United States Department of Health and Human Services (USDHHS), there is both good news and not so good news for New Jersey (NJ) on obesity. The good news is that NJ has the 10th lowest rate of adult obesity in the nation at 23.4%. The not so good news is that NJ has the 23rd highest rate of obese and overweight children in the US. NJ is tied with Missouri and Virginia at 31%. This means that almost one in three NJ children over the age of 10 is overweight or obese. Also, according to the CDC, almost 18% of NJ’s low-income preschool-aged children are obese. This is 3% higher than the national average, but does appear to be stabilizing.

Although much has been done on a county, state and national level to combat this epidemic, for the health and well-being of our children there continues to be much more to do. Children with weight problems can be affected in many ways. They can experience emotional, social and physical issues in addition to health problems. For example, obese children and adolescents are more likely to be at risk for heart disease, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and Type 2 diabetes than are children and adolescents without weight issues. And, obese children and adolescents are more likely to become obese as adults. (CDC)

Nutrition & Physical Activity Choices are the Keys to Change

Combating childhood obesity is possible through nutrition and physical activity choices. Nutrition choices for children of all ages should include a variety of whole plant foods and lean protein foods, with sensible fat and beverage choices. For whole plant foods aim for:

- A variety of fruit and vegetables each day, choosing whole fruits and vegetables over juice for children more often;
- About one-half of grains to come from whole grains;
- Several cups of legumes each week. (Increase slowly and eat with plenty of fluids, if children are not used to the high fiber content of beans.)

For non-plant foods:

- Choose fish*, poultry, or beans as an alternative to beef, pork, and lamb;
- When choosing meat, select lean cuts and smaller portions;
- Bake, broil, or poach meat, poultry and fish

*When choosing fish for children or women of child-bearing age, be sure to check for current recommendations from the Environmental Protection Agency at www.epa.gov.

Other tips:

- Reduce intakes of sugar sweetened beverages and foods;
- Reduce salt intake, including salt from processed foods.

(American Academy of Pediatrics)

Making sure that children are active each and every day is also recommended. Children and adolescents should be active for at least 60 minutes each day, including activities that are aerobic, muscle-strengthening, and bone-strengthening. The following are examples of these activities from the 2008 Physical Activity Guidelines of the USDHHS:

- Aerobic activities are those in which young people rhythmically move their large muscles. Running, hopping, skipping, jumping rope, swimming, dancing, and bicycling are all examples of aerobic activities.

  - Muscle-strengthening activities make muscles do more work than usual during activities of daily life. Muscle-strengthening activities can include playing on playground equipment, climbing trees, and playing tug-of-war.

  - Bone-strengthening activities produce a force on the bones that promotes bone growth and strength. This force is commonly produced by impact with the ground. Running, jumping rope, basketball, tennis, and hopscotch are all examples of bone-strengthening activities. Bone-strengthening activities can also be aerobic and muscle-strengthening.

(USDHHS)

With help from parents, teachers, family and the many others who are part of children’s lives, we can make a change in the future of the children of NJ.

For more information, visit the following sites:
About Winter Squash

Named after the American Indian word askutasquash, meaning “raw or uncooked”, (most likely referring to summer varieties of squash), winter squash is an excellent partner on hearty cold weather menus. It was among one of the earliest plants cultivated in the Americas, with many varieties that have been grown for thousands of years.

Contrary to its summer counterpart, winter squash is not edible in the raw state due to its tough hard rind. Another difference between winter and summer squash are their seeds. The seeds in winter squash are edible only after they have been roasted and shelled, (well worth the effort) whereas summer squash have smaller, tenderer seeds.

Although availability of winter squash increases in the fall and winter months, and we tend to think of favorites such as pumpkin, butternut and acorn as harvest vegetables, winter squash are actually available year-round. As an added bonus, they have a rich sweet taste and are abundant in beta-carotene, potassium, and Vitamin C.

Buying Winter Squash

When choosing winter squash, there are a few guidelines that will help you to choose those that are fully mature, yet not past their peak. Look for squash that have the following:

- A hard tough rind
- A feeling of heaviness for the squash size
- A surface devoid of cuts, sunken areas, or moldy spots

Preparing Winter Squash

There are a variety of ways to prepare winter squash including cooking it in a conventional oven either whole, or cut in half, or cooking it in the microwave oven. First, always wash the outside rind with a hard brush. To prepare squash whole, bake in a conventional oven at 325°F for 1 to 1 ½ hours. It will take approximately one half the time to prepare squash that has been cut in half, with seeds removed. To prepare squash in the microwave, first pierce the whole squash in several places (to prevent it from exploding) and then cook it on high for 8 to 12 minutes, or until tender when stuck with a fork. To save even more time in preparing squash, look for certain varieties of winter squash, such as butternut, that has been cubed and packaged for easy preparation at your local supermarket.

There are several seasonings that complement winter squash including allspice, cardamom, ground cloves, cinnamon, nutmeg, and ginger. Although delicious simply baked or steamed for a side dish, try these other options to enjoy winter squash:

- Stuff winter squash with a low-fat meat mixture for a tasty main dish
- Small, whole squash can be baked like a potato and stuffed with vegetables for a colorful side dish
- Winter squash is especially delicious when baked and glazed like sweet potatoes

Sources: Georgia Department of Agriculture "Starting with Ingredients." Green, A. 2006.

Roasted Winter Squash

Try this quick, tasty recipe paired with roast chicken or fish and your favorite green vegetable for a balanced, delicious meal.

Toss any peeled and cubed winter squash with 1-2 teaspoons of olive oil. Spread in one layer on a flat cooking sheet with sides. Sprinkle lightly with kosher salt and/or other favorite seasonings and roast at 400°F for 20-30 minutes or until tender.
Whole Grain Foods Offer More Than Fiber

Eating whole grains for their fiber content is a good idea, because we all know that fiber is an important part of our diet, but whole grains provide so much more than just fiber. For example, whole grain foods may help you stay healthy by:

- Protecting against heart disease
- Managing weight
- Reducing the risk of cancer, and
- Decreasing the risk of diabetes

So, where can we find whole grains? Whole grains are made from the entire grain seed, or kernel, which consists of the bran, germ and endosperm. Examples of whole grains include whole wheat, rye and barley, popcorn, brown and wild rice, buckwheat, and whole oats such as oatmeal.

Other types of grains, known as refined grains, have had the bran and the germ removed during the milling process, resulting in a product with less vitamins, minerals and fiber than its whole grain counterpart. Examples of refined grains include white flour, white bread and white rice.

But, don’t be fooled by grains that look brown or claim to be “multi-grain”, or “100% wheat”. Colors and words on the front label do not tell the whole story. To be sure, look for the word “whole” in front of the grain type near the top of the ingredients list.

Understanding whole grains is an important step towards including them in your diet every day. Actually, the recommendation from MyPyramid is to try to make at least one-half of all of the grains you eat whole grains. You can do this by spending a little extra time at first reading food labels at the store and experimenting with whole grain products such as pasta, rice, cereal and bread. Once you’ve found your favorite whole grain products, the servings, and the fiber, will start to add up.

Work towards eating the equivalent of six ounces of grain products daily. The following each equal one-ounce:

- 1 slice of bread
- 1 cup ready-to-eat cereal
- ½ cup cooked cereal
- ½ cup cooked rice
- ½ cup cooked pasta
- 3 cups popcorn
- 1 “mini” bagel

Sources: Bell Institute of Health and Nutrition & United States Department of Agriculture
Wednesday, March 24, 2010
12:00pm - 1:00pm
WC Administration Building
$5.00/person

Learn the latest on nutrition & physical activity tips for the prevention of cancer.

• The award-winning *Power of Prevention* will be presented
• Personal Goals Worksheet provided
• Healthful lunch will be served

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