

HEALTHY EATING FROM CHILDHOOD TO ADOLESCENCE

Nutrition is the intake of adequate and balanced nutrients that the body needs in order to protect and improve health and the quality of life. Healthy eating does not only mean to fill the stomach, to suppress the feeling of hunger or to eat things that you desire. Healthy nutrition is important throughout one's lifespan, and it is even more important during childhood and adolescence since these are the key growth periods of life.

Families play the most influential role in a child's development of eating preferences, habits and patterns. A child learns healthy eating habits first in his/her family. Later, these habits are shaped with the onset of socialization processes during the school age. Acquiring healthy eating habits during these periods will lead to physical, psychological and social well-being during adulthood. Over time, these habits will also be adopted and internalized by the whole society. We took into account the individual and social importance of healthy nutrition while preparing this newsletter and wish it will be beneficial for you.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HEALTHY EATING IN CHILDHOOD

Healthy eating in childhood is not only important for supporting physical development and keeping the immune system strong, but it is also important for a healthy brain development. This development can only be achieved through healthy nutrition, along with the genetic and environmental factors. Therefore;

- School-age children spend a lot of time outside. Because of that, it becomes harder to control the nutrients they consume, compared to earlier ages. At this point, the educating role of family and school to increase children's awareness about healthy foods is very crucial.
- Children learn behavioral patterns from their role models in the family. It is also the same for the eating patterns. Parents should guide their children and become a role model with their own eating behaviours to help their children develop healthy eating habits.
- Nutrition habits and physical activities should be arranged in a way to maintain the appropriate weight for the child's developmental level. Providing diversity in food sources, limiting fat and sugar intake, including fiber-rich foods in diet and taking vitamins and minerals at a sufficient level will help to maintain a healthy body weight.
- Children should be encouraged to consume meals at regular times.
- Energy intake in children should be equal to the level of energy consumption. Daily nutrition and activity levels should be balanced. Children should be encouraged to engage in physical activity if their lifestyle is sedentary. The time spent in front of TV, tablet and computer should be limited.
- Children should get in the habit of drinking sufficient water to stay hydrated. The intake of fizzy drinks and juices should be limited.
- Food should not be used as a reward for any behavior or success. This may cause associating emotions such as sadness, happiness, or approval with eating behaviors. This association may lead to negative consequences in terms of physical and mental health.
- Do not force your children to eat. Pressure will increase the resistance to eat. Applying pressure also violates children's right to autonomy and self-determination over their own body by distorting their body

boundaries. As they grow up, this will negatively affect their ability to set and respect body boundaries and say “no” to others. Therefore, instead of causing pressure, eating habits should be arranged according to children’s daily program and should be integrated into their routine over a period of time.

- It is important to restrict junk food and prevent their consumption to avoid habitual patterns, rather than banning them entirely. Providing a habit of healthy snack times, preparing fun presentations of healthy foods, reducing the purchase of unhealthy foods and determining the times/rates they will eat together within the limits, will prevent their cravings and insistence.
- The children should be directed to an exercise program suitable for his/her age and desire.
- Provide alternatives that balance the nutritional value for food groups that children do not like and have difficulty in eating.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HEALTHY EATING IN ADOLESCENCE

Adolescence is the fastest period after childhood, in terms of physical, cognitive, psychological and social growth. With the acceleration of growth, the body's need for energy and nutrients also increases. In this period, adequate and balanced nutrition becomes very important for establishing lifelong eating habits and for growth and development.

Skipping meals frequently, irregular meal times, consuming unhealthy foods in haste, not getting proper nutrition required for growth and development due to fear of gaining weight are among the common unhealthy eating habits in adolescence. Improper and inadequate nutrition can lead to delay in growth, obesity and various illnesses. In addition, there is a high risk of adverse effects on attention, perception, memory, learning and school success. Therefore;

- It is important to have a family eating routine at home with the whole family sitting around the table together. This habit, which must be established at a young age, should also be maintained during adolescence and parents should become a role model for their children in this regard.
- Food should not be eaten in front of the TV or computer. In this case, the person's awareness is directed towards the screen rather than the taste, the amount of the food intake or the feeling of satiety. Therefore, as a result of mindless eating, the amount of uncontrolled calorie intake may cause obesity in the long run.
- If possible, meals should be eaten at the same time every day. It is most convenient to eat 3 main meals and 2 snacks.
- Adolescents should not starve for more than 4 hours and they should have breakfast in the first half hour after waking up to speed up metabolism.
- Water is one of the greatest nutritional needs of the body at all ages. Adolescents should be encouraged to drink plenty of water. In this regard, you can benefit from various reminder phone-applications, hang reminding images around the house, and keep glass water bottles in each room.

- Iron and calcium are very important for adolescents who are in the growth-development process. Iron gains additional importance with the onset of menstruation in girls. For this reason, foods rich in iron, such as meat, eggs, legumes, dark green vegetables, and molasses should be consumed.
- Calcium intake is especially important for bone health and preventing osteoporosis in adulthood. Adolescents generally drink less milk and consume more carbonated drinks which decrease calcium intake. Carbonated drinks also increase the calcium / phosphorus ratio which causes calcium absorption deterioration.
- A variety of nutrients should be provided in the diet to ensure that the body receives all vitamins and minerals in balance.
- Foods containing vitamin B increase performance in concentration, perception, learning and memory. Vitamin B also increases resistance to stress. Daily vitamin B needs can be met by consuming foods containing animal protein such as meat, milk, eggs, seafood and grains.
- Consumption of excessively fatty and sugary foods should be avoided. It causes the blood to be drawn from the brain to the digestive system, resulting in fatigue, sleepiness and decrease in cognitive abilities.
- The energy need also increases in adolescents, who regularly exercise. Adolescents should be informed and supported about the amount of additional energy their sport requires and about the dietary program they need to follow to meet this need. It is recommended to pay attention to protein intake and to include meat, fish, milk and dairy products into the diet by considering the type of the sport.

FREQUENT NUTRITIONAL PROBLEMS AND EATING DISORDERS

Nutritional problems seen in preschool and primary school are generally rejecting eating (eating less / not eating at all), picky eating, not eating on their own, vomiting, unusual behavior during meal times (crying, irritability, anger etc.), swallowing and/or chewing problems. Research shows that these problems may occur due to the mother-child relationship, accompanying medical conditions, physiological development problems, a specific trauma (nutrient leakage into the respiratory tract, danger of suffocation, etc.) or other emotional issues. It is important for parents to get support from specialists before these problems turn into habits.

The frequency of obesity, which is the result of unbalanced nutrition in children and adolescents, is increasing day by day in our country and all around the world. The reasons for this increase include insufficient breast milk intake, changes in dietary habits brought by modern life (fat and carbohydrate-weighted nutrition), inadequate chewing, eating very fast, “the more my child eats, the better he/she will develop” belief, fast food culture, and media influence which increase the willingness and encouragement of children, and the time children spend away from physical activity with computer and tv.

It is important to treat obesity before it causes serious health problems. The treatment is possible with a balanced diet and regular exercise. The basis of this treatment is preparing a nutrition program that does not prevent the physiological growth of the child / adolescent. This diet should become a way of life with persistence. Setting strict restrictions and excessive bans of certain foods will cause the child / adolescent to quit the diet in a short time and develop emotional problems. For this reason, we must remind ourselves that parents should become role models for their children with their own eating habits. Therefore, parents should

not do what they don't want their children to do, should organize meals by considering their children's developmental needs, should notice early symptoms and take precautions accordingly. They should refrain from providing sweet-sugar at the end of a meal, provide a variety of foods to the child, teach them to recognize unhealthy foods without compelling feelings of anxiety and guilt.

"Eating disorders", which start especially during adolescence, are accepted as a psychological illness in the literature and have permanent and even fatal effects. These disorders have increased significantly in the last decade. Eating disorders are divided into three basic groups as anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa and binge eating disorder. Regardless of the underlying causes, the common point of eating disorders is that the focus of the person is on his/her body and that his/her thoughts are constantly focused on food and weight. The person either ignores the feeling of hunger or eats unlimitedly. In both cases, the person struggles with intense guilt and finds him/herself in a dangerous and vicious circle due to the dysfunctional measures s/he takes to alleviate this emotion.

Many other factors than the anxiety about calorie and weight lie at the root of eating disorders. The person's family and peer relations (especially mother-child relation), personality traits, emotional states, history of bullying or abuse, ideal body perception of the family/society/popular culture, the meanings attributed to the body are the main factors that cause eating disorders. If we narrow the perspective to the family factor, children who grow up in families that spend a lot of time on issues such as thinness, diet, and appearance are at a risk group. Also families which are perfectionist, exaggerate success, show lack of support, are over-protective or oppressive, in which boundaries are not clear and roles are intertwined can cause eating disorders.

It is important not to criticize the child about eating or weight. Parents and children should eat together as much as possible, showing that eating is also a part of socializing. Children should not be pressured to eat less or more. Parents should observe the eating behavior of adolescents who start a diet and they should not compare their children with others. Parents should also inform their children about physical changes during adolescence, healthy body image and healthy-balanced dietary habits. If parents notice a significant change in their children's weight or eating behaviors, they should consult an expert, without wasting time.

Today, there are also cases where healthy eating causes excessive anxiety and even turns into obsession. When it comes to zero-sized women, muscular and well-groomed men, detox cures, and healing foods, an healthy eating obsession called "orthorexia nervosa" has become to appear. In fact, when a person is so concerned with the quality of nutrients that this may turn into an eating disorder over time. It is very important for parents to observe both themselves and their children in this regard.

A healthy diet means a healthy society. With this perspective, we should continue to raise awareness in children and adolescents and become true role models for them. We should not forget the importance of a healthy and balanced diet in their physical, emotional and social development.

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