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• **OBESITY IN CHILDREN.**

Obesity can be a serious medical condition of difficult management in the pediatric patient; it includes several aspects all equally important: diet, daily physical activity and psychological support.

The prime objectives of medical management at this age are:

- a) Maintain normal growth pattern.
- b) Allow height to catch weight.
- c) Finally, favor a 5-10% weight loss and then maintain weight control.

1) EXERCISE:

- i) A minimum of 30-60 minutes per day, a daily practice of an agreeable and enjoyable physical activity for the child, for instance: pedaling a tricycle or a bike, playing with a scooter, roller skating, dancing, swimming, running or playing with push-pull toys, rope jumping, swimming or a particular aerobics routine.
- ii) Restrict TV time to 1 hour per day / Do not eat in front of TV / Do not use remote while watching TV / Do not have TV in child's room.
- iii) Eliminate sweetened juices, soft drinks and sodas altogether.
- iv) Restrict sedentary attitudes and parents should serve as role models for proper eating habits and exercise routines.

2) DIET:

- i) Maintain a basic daily caloric requirement of 1000-1500 calories/day: 50% carbohydrates, 30% fats and 20% protein.
- ii) Supplement with iron, calcium, multivitamins (Vitamins A, C, B1, B2 & B3).
- iii) Promote a daily intake of abundant fiber – rich vegetables.
- iv) Restrict fats and cholesterol – rich foods.

How to achieve this goal?

- i) Allow for heavy meals only at natural scheduled mealtimes: breakfast, lunch and dinner with mom dishing up the meals, absolutely NO seconds; give $\frac{1}{2}$ dessert serving; NO food after dinner.
- ii) Between meals, the only foods allowed are raw vegetables, non-caloric drinks and water; complete restriction of snacks and junk food is mandatory.
- iii) Cooking oil must be ONLY Extra Virgin olive oil, and a good butter substitute is Smart Balance Spread.
- iv) Children above 2 years should only have skim milk 1% or 2 %. Whole milk is absolutely prohibited. A good cheese substitute is Alpine Lace Swiss cheese.
- v) Egg substitute: egg beaters.
- vi) Sugar substitute: Splenda.
- vii) White meats are preferred over red meats; always choose skinless and lean cuts. Red meats should be restricted to once per month.
- viii) Mediterranean diet is the BEST diet: lean meats, oily fish such as salmon and/or tuna twice weekly, olive oil, salads, avocado, whole grain foods such as whole wheat bread, brown rice and whole grain pasta; DO NOT use white food products such as white rice, white bread, white pasta and potatoes.

3) PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT:

- i) Teach as you do not as you say, in other words teach healthy feeding habits by keeping a healthy diet yourself.
- ii) Request support from the school personnel to watch for a healthy diet for your children.
- iii) Do not use appetite suppressants or dieting pills.
- iv) Refer to the nutritionist when everything else fails.

Reference: "Nutrition Guidelines", American Academy of Pediatrics, 2004.