

## What to Say (or not Say) to your Overweight Child

AS A PARENT, you care about your child's health. Given the public-health focus on childhood obesity, it would be hard to not be concerned if your child is overweight. The question many parents in this position are grappling with is "Should I say something to my child about the weight—or not?"

Research suggests you shouldn't, because making comments to a child about weight—whether those comments come as teasing, criticism or "helpful" advice—can be counterproductive. Rather than leading to healthful behavioral changes, weight-related comments from family members have been shown to contribute to negative body image. This can lead to weight gain, obesity and eating disorders in adolescence and into adulthood, which is exactly what parents don't want to see happen.

Mentioning a child's weight or size, or commenting that the child should eat differently to control his or her weight—even if the child is seriously obese—can increase the risk of binge-eating and unhealthy



weight-control methods such as meal skipping, fasting, purging or the use of diet pills or laxatives.

And the side effects of weight-related comments don't affect only children who are overweight. When children of average weight are told they weigh too much, they are more likely to develop poor body image, with all of its potential consequences.

Adolescence is a particularly vulnerable time, because kids' bodies are undergoing rapid changes at the same time their awareness of cultural standards of attractiveness is increasing. A study published in the June issue of *Eating and Weight*

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### did you know...

- ▶ Across the nation less than half of parents read aloud to their children every day. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends reading aloud starting at birth.
- ▶ Nearly 3 in 10 refrigerators are above the 40°F temperature recommended to keep foods fresh longer.
- ▶ Cucumbers should be stored at room temperature. They begin to rot when held below 50°F.
- ▶ Each year about 20,000 children younger than 5 years of age are hospitalized from flu complications, like pneumonia.
- ▶ Flu season runs from October to May, with most cases occurring from late December to early March.
- ▶ The nasal spray version of the flu vaccine is no longer recommended by the US Centers of Disease Control (CDC), for children or adults.

Sources: American Academy of Pediatrics, Utah State University, CDC, Kidshealth.org, reachoutandread.org.

### Quotable Quotes

“Be thankful for what you have; you'll end up having more. If you concentrate on what you don't have, you will never ever have enough.”

– Oprah Winfrey

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*Disorders* found that women whose parents commented on their weight when they were growing up were more likely to be dissatisfied with their current weight, even if they were not overweight.

On the flip side, talking to your children about healthful eating, without mentioning weight, may *reduce* the risk of unhealthy eating behaviors. This is something that all children (and adults) can benefit from. Take these meaningful conversations a step further by cultivating habits as a family that encourage both physical health and a healthful relationship with food and eating.

### Be a Healthy Role Model

Poor diet quality and physical inactivity contribute to weight gain as well as chronic disease — no matter what someone weighs. Parents are a child's main role models for eating and activity behaviors, and research suggests that when parents make their own healthful food and activity changes, it has a more beneficial impact on their children's weight than direct intervention.

Parents influence nutritional choices through shared meals, by deciding what foods will be available at home and by setting the tone for “this is how our family eats.” If you snack mindlessly in front of the television, eat to soothe stress or routinely clean your plate even if you're already full, how can you expect your child to behave differently?

### Limit Screen Time and Sedentary Time

Kids need 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity each day for good health. Research suggests that if you want your kids to be more active, what you *do* is more important than what you *say*, in part because encouragement to be active can be perceived as nagging, especially if you yourself are not active. Look for more active pastimes the whole family can enjoy, even if it's just walking the dog or going to the park together. Remember that shorter bursts of activity that add up to the daily goal are fine.

Although screen time recommendations are being revised to reflect the smartphone and tablet era, a good goal is to limit extracurricular screen time to less than 2 hours per day. Start by turning off the TV during meals.

### Cultivate a Healthy Food Environment

Make nutritious foods readily available. Keep fresh fruits and vegetables at eye level in the refrigerator and store



healthy snacks where your children can access them. Visit farmers' markets with your kids and let them help choose fruits and veggies at the grocery store. Let them help with meal planning and prep when appropriate, and get them excited about all kinds of foods—not just dessert.

### Encourage Intuitive Eating

Pressuring children to eat and restricting their intake of snacks and desserts can interfere with their ability to regulate their own food intake. Instructions to “finish what's on your plate” or warnings to “eat all your broccoli or no dessert” can condition kids to distrust what their bodies are telling them, to eat when they aren't hungry — and to hate broccoli. Remember that children's growth fluctuates, and so will their appetite and eating. If you suspect that your child wants a snack simply because he or she is sad or bored, ask about it.

Restricting desirable foods can lead to obsession and overeating when these forbidden foods are available (the “last supper” syndrome), often accompanied by shame and guilt, which can trigger emotional eating. Make desserts and other favorite treat foods available on occasion, and let your child choose them when they are available. Healthful diets still have room for treats.

— *Carrie Dennett, MPH, RDN, CD*  
*Nutrition By Carrie*  
[www.nutritionbycarrie.com](http://www.nutritionbycarrie.com)

## KIDS' HEALTH & SAFETY

# The Flu: A Guide for Parents

### What is the flu?

Influenza (the flu) is an infection of the nose, throat and lungs caused by influenza viruses. There are many different influenza viruses that are constantly changing. Flu viruses cause illness, hospital stays and deaths in the United States each year.



### How serious is the flu?

Flu illness can vary from mild to severe. While the flu can be serious even in people who are otherwise healthy, it can be especially dangerous for young children and children who have certain long-term health conditions.

### How does the flu spread?

Most experts believe flu viruses spread mainly by droplets from people with the flu who cough, sneeze or talk. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people nearby. Less often, a person might get the flu by touching something that has flu virus on it and then touching their own mouth, eyes or nose.

### What are the symptoms of the flu?

Symptoms of the flu can include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills, fatigue and sometimes vomiting and diarrhea (more common in children than adults). Some people with the flu will not have a fever.

### How long can a sick person spread the flu to others?

People with the flu may be able to infect others from 1 day before getting sick to 5 to 7 days after. However, children and people with weakened immune systems can infect others for longer periods of time.

### Protect Your Child

#### How can I protect my child against the flu?

The most important thing you can do to protect against the flu is to get a flu vaccine for yourself and your child.

- Vaccination is recommended for everyone 6 months and older.

- Employees and volunteers in child care homes and centers need to have an influenza vaccination between August 1 and December 1 of each year.

The flu vaccine is updated annually to protect against the flu viruses that research indicates are most likely to cause illness during the upcoming flu season. Flu vaccines are made using strict safety and production measures. Over the years, millions of flu vaccines have been given in the United States with a very good safety record.

#### What are some of the other ways I can protect my child against the flu?

Get vaccinated and take everyday steps to help prevent the spread of germs:

- Stay away from people who are sick.
- If your child is sick with the flu, keep him or her in a separate room from others in the household, if possible.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after it has been used.
- Wash hands often with soap and water. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
- Clean and disinfect hard surfaces and objects that may be contaminated with germs, including bathroom surfaces, kitchen counters, door knobs, light switches and toys for children.

### If Your Child Is Sick

#### Can my child go to school, day care or camp if he or she is sick?

No. Your child should stay home to rest and to avoid spreading the flu to other children or caregivers. Keep your child home from school, day care or camp for at least 24 hours after their fever is gone. The fever should be gone without the use of a fever-reducing medicine. A fever is defined as 100°F (37.8°C) or higher.

— Adapted from [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

## Dried Cranberry Pilaf

Butter .....	4 Tbsp
Onion, chopped .....	1
Dried cranberries .....	½ cup
Basmati rice .....	2 cups
Chicken or vegetable broth .....	4 cups
Salt and pepper .....	to taste
Parsley, chopped .....	¼ cup
Almonds, sliced, toasted .....	¼ cup

1. Melt the butter in a large saucepan over medium heat. Add onion and cook until soft, about 5 minutes. Add rice and sauté until translucent, 2–3 minutes.
2. Add the cranberries, broth and bring to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer until tender, about 18 minutes. Fluff rice with a fork. Stir in parsley, just before serving. Sprinkle with almonds.

Yield: 8 servings

Meet requirement for grains/breads

—*Everyday Meals from a Well Stocked Pantry*

## Simple Sweet Potato Mash

Sweet potatoes .....	3-4 medium (2 pounds)
Butter .....	¼ cup
Milk .....	¼–½ cup
Salt .....	¼ tsp
Cinnamon (optional) .....	½ tsp
Maple syrup (optional) .....	2 Tbsp

1. Rinse sweet potatoes and pierce with a fork. Microwave on high about 10 minutes, until soft, turning over ½ way through. Cover sweet potatoes with a towel and let cool for 15–20 minutes.
2. Slice sweet potatoes in half long ways and scoop out the soft centers into a large bowl. Add remaining ingredients, including either cinnamon or maple syrup and mash with a potato masher. Serve warm.

Yield: 8 servings

Meets requirement for fruit/vegetable

## Activity Corner

### A HEALTHY HOLIDAY HOUSE

This holiday project is creative, edible and good for you!

Give each child a paper plate to build their holiday house on, as well as 2 whole and 2 half graham crackers to create a rectangular box and 2 more whole crackers for the pitched roof.

For the “mortar” mix a packet of plain instant oatmeal with ½ the water called for and one tablespoon of honey, stir, let sit 10 minutes.

After the house is built and the oatmeal has dried, let the children decorate their house with a variety of healthy foods such as raisins, dried cherries, dried apricots, cheerios or other cereal, pretzel sticks, small crackers, nuts and pumpkin seeds. Smooth peanut butter or more oatmeal may be used to “glue” on the decorations.

Encourage the children to use their imaginations to decorate the walls, roof and the plate as well! When the house is complete, sprinkle on shredded coconut to make a snowy wonderland.

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**Food Q: What do snowmen eat?**  
**Funny A: Iceberg lettuce with chili sauce!**