

Keep Kids Diabetes Free

Help children develop good habits for a long, healthy life

by Lynn Tryba

It's impossible to watch Beyonce dance with students in a school cafeteria and not want to bust a move. And that's the point. The singer created a dance routine video that participating schools receive as part of Michelle Obama's "Let's Move" campaign against childhood obesity.

It's no wonder the First Lady is getting out the big guns to fight fat. The childhood obesity rate in America has tripled over the past 30 years. With gym classes and athletic programs being cut from schools and kids averaging 7.5 hours a day using entertainment media—including TV, the Internet, smart phones, and video games—you have a recipe for overweight and Type 2 diabetes.

Scary stats

The statistics are sobering. If childhood obesity rates continue, one-third of Americans born in the year 2000 or later will develop Type 2 diabetes at some point in their lifetimes.

Fortunately, you can help kids fight Type 2 diabetes with a three-pronged approach: eating well, getting enough exercise, and considering certain supplements.

Domino effect

When a person eats, glucose gets broken down from the food and enters the bloodstream. The pancreas secretes insulin, a hormone that sweeps up the sugar and delivers it to cells to burn as energy. The more food eaten, the more insulin needed. If a person's body stops making enough insulin or the body's cells start ignoring it (called insulin resistance)—leading the body to pump out even more of the hormone—Type 2 diabetes can develop.

"If you have diabetes, all the extra blood sugar and insulin can damage your circulation, doubling your risk of heart attack and stroke, and setting you up for long-term circulatory problems," explains Jacob Teitelbaum, MD.

Modern challenges

Back in the day, going out to eat was a rare treat. Nowadays, with parents typically working full time, convenience foods and fast food restaurants are commonplace.

Snack consumption has also skyrocketed. Supersized portions—especially of soda and other sugary drinks—have only exacerbated the problem.

Parental intervention

Help your kids make smart food choices. Don't buy products that contain white sugar or high fructose corn syrup. Avoid refined carbs like white bread, white rice, and white pasta. "Start experimenting with healthier substitutes like brown rice and whole grains you may not have tried before," advises nutrition expert Terry Lemerond.

Start kids off on the right foot each morning with a high-fiber, low-glycemic breakfast. One study showed that eating a barley or rye cereal lowered blood glucose and improved glucose tolerance at subsequent meals compared with white bread. Research shows that those who eat low-glycemic breakfasts—which increase satiety—eat less at lunch than those who eat high-glycemic breakfasts.

Be sure to include one low-glycemic carb at each meal. Good choices include beans and lentils, most fruits and vegetables, and oats or quinoa. Between meals, offer kids protein-based or low-carb snacks. "Some choices might be hard-boiled eggs or a piece of organic cheese," Lemerond advises. "Low-carbohydrate vegetables, like salad greens, cucumbers, broccoli, cauliflower, celery, pickles, and olives are good choices."

Consider supplements

Research shows that people with higher levels of vitamin D are 40 percent less likely to develop diabetes. This vitamin helps the pancreas secrete insulin. Vitamin D also eases systemic inflammation, a factor in insulin resistance. Since many Americans (especially those who live in northern states) are low in this vitamin, supplementation should be considered.

If children are not eating enough produce every day, it can be hard for them to meet the fiber recommendations of the American Heart Association. Fortunately, fiber supplements made for children are now on the market.

SELECTED SOURCES “A Growing Problem,” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, www.cdc.gov n “Blood Sugar Regulation in Pre-Type 2 Diabetes” by Terry Lemerond, www.terrytalksnutrition.com n “Diabetes” by Robert J. Ferry, Jr, MD, www.emedicinehealth.com n “Effect of Cereal Test Breakfasts Differing in Glycemic Index . . . on Daylong Glucose Tolerance in Healthy Subjects” by A. C. Nilsson et al., *Am J Clin Nutr*, 3/08 n “Learn the Facts,” www.letsmove.gov n “Low Glycemic Index Breakfasts and Reduced Food Intake in Preadolescent Children” by J. M. Warren et al., *Pediatrics*, 11/03 n *Real Cause, Real Cure* by Jacob Teitelbaum, MD, and Bill Gottlieb (\$31.96, Rodale, 2011)

Ideas for Parents

1. Limit media time for kids to one to two hours daily.
2. Serve your family water instead of sugary drinks.
3. Make sure your child exercises each day. Regular exercise can lower the risk of developing diabetes by 40 percent. Even something as simple as taking 30-minute walks five days a week lowers the risk for diabetes.