

Healthy Weight and Central Coast Children

The problem: Surveys of Central Coast school children in 2003 revealed that about 1 in 3 are overweight or obese (compared to around 1 in 10 in the 1960's to 1980's). This alarming statistic is consistent with warnings following National figures from the 1990's showing rates of overweight had doubled and obesity tripled in just a decade.

Is it serious? There are serious long-term consequences for overweight and obese children "including diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol and eventually cardiac disease. Problems that were traditionally only seen in adults are now being seen in children," says Dr Adam Buckmaster, Staff Specialist Paediatrician for Central Coast Health

In the short term overweight and obese children may also suffer social stigma as well as orthopaedic problems.

Can we fix it?... Yes we can! The alarming increase in overweight and obesity is not due to some strange genetic mutation. It results from changes in our lifestyle that we can choose to do something about. Many of these changes have sneaked up on us, like the increase in sedentary recreation and the proliferation of fast food options.

Despite these changes to our environment, our need to balance energy consumption and expenditure remains the same. We as humans thrive on physical activity and need a minimum daily dose to maintain health. It is recommended that children are moderately physically active for around 60 mins per day and vigorously active for 20mins on 2-3 occasions per week.

Steps to success.

- Support the school in offering a minimum of 120 mins of programmed physical activity per week.
- Limit TV viewing and computer use to less than 1 hour per day outside of school.
- Encourage active play at every opportunity.
- Limit calorie dense foods at home and in the school lunchbox. Think 3 servings of fruit and 4 servings of vegies per day.





Fundamental Movement Skills and your Child

Research shows that a key factor in maintaining an active lifestyle is the development of fundamental movement skills as a child. The critical skills to master at primary school are catch, kick, two-handed strike, overhand throw, sprint run, vertical jump, dodge, leap, side gallop, skip, hop and static balance.

Fundamental motor skills are difficult to learn and most people underestimate the time it takes to achieve mastery. Quality primary school physical education programs have a focus on developing these fundamental skills, not just playing major games in which they are included. This means plenty of feedback and lots of fun drills that repeat the various components of the skills in small groups.

You can help your child by doing activities at home that practice these skills. If you want ideas for age appropriate activities a great resource is 'Sportstart – Developing Your Kids Skills at Home' from the Australian Sports Commission, available for \$13 from The Healthy Lifestyles Bookshop ph (08) 8340 3388.

Walking and riding are the way to go!

One of the big contributors to an increase in sedentary behaviour and consequently the overweight/obesity epidemic is our growing love affair with driving, even for short trips. In recent times Australia has become characterised by high levels of car use and low levels of walking for short trips compared to other countries.

The Australian National Guidelines for Physical Activity advise “think of movement as an opportunity, not an inconvenience!” What a great opportunity to get some of your daily dose of moderate physical activity by including walking or riding in some of the daily trip to and from school. Not only will it make a terrific contribution to the health of you and your children; it will also relieve some of the motor vehicle congestion at and near the school. If you live too far to walk or ride the whole trip, consider parking between a half and one km from school and walking the children to school from there.



Research supports the old adage, “Healthy body, healthy mind”!

Participation in regular physical activity produces positive effects on psychosocial outcomes. In addition, physical activity may result in improved social skills, an enhanced ability to concentrate and learn and, finally, the development of a healthy lifestyle, which will contribute to well being throughout the lifespan. (The effects of regular moderate to vigorous physical activity on student outcomes: a review. Canadian Journal of Public Health, 86(1):62-5).

Movement and Daily Physical Activity Helps the Brain to...

- Anchor new information
- Improve memory
- Maintain alertness
- Strengthen key areas of the learning brain
- Increase efficiency
- Improve oxygen and nutrients
- Improve creativity
- Improve stress management
- Increase classroom enthusiasm
- Improve cooperation



Kim Pierson, 'Exercise Your Mind - The Importance of Daily Physical Activity In Our Schools', Strategies Nov/Dec 2002

Use it or Lose it!

Inactivity has been identified as the second greatest cause of preventable illness to tobacco smoking! Conservative models estimate that the amount of disease that could be prevented if our Australian population was moderately active is 18% of coronary heart disease, 16% stroke, 13% non-insulin dependent diabetes, 19% colon cancer, 9-12% breast cancer and 10% of depression.

Physical Education a Fundamental Right

“Every human being has a fundamental right to PE and sport, which are essential for the full development of the personality. The freedom to develop physical, intellectual and moral powers through PE and sport, must be guaranteed both within the education system and in other aspects of social life”, United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organisation.

