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"treating the cause of your problem, not just the symptoms"

Children are Now More Obese

Childhood obesity is becoming a serious health problem, with over 25 percent of children considered obese. Obesity in children results in many emotional and physical problems. Emotional problems include altered body image, depression, and poor self-esteem. Physical concerns are that obese children are more likely to become obese adults. Adult obesity increases the risk of heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, certain types of cancer, and physical disability from eventual arthritic changes in their joints. The more obese a child is and the longer a child remains obese, the more likely the child will become an obese adult. In fact, obesity in adolescence is more related to adult obesity than a child's birth weight.

With respect to diet, an intake of only 50 to 100 excess calories per day can result in a five to ten pound weight gain per year. For this reason, it is important that parents encourage healthy eating habits in children. Choosing lower fat foods, lower fat preparation methods, and lower fat snacks for the whole family is a healthy approach.

A lack physical inactivity is a major contributor to obesity in children. An important factor responsible for children's inactivity is excessive television viewing and computer use. Children and adolescents spend an average of 22 to 25 hours a week watching television. They are also more likely to consume high calorie foods while watching television. In fact, some experts believe that obesity in children increased by two percent for each hour of television watched. For these reasons, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that parents limit the amount of time children watch television to one to *two hours a day*. In regards to exercise, the following are some tips to help encourage your child to become more active:

- Family life, not school, is the strongest influence on a child's exercise habits. Parents should set a good example by pursuing activities with their children. If you are not active, they will likely follow your example.
- Exercise should be fun. If it's not, the child will soon abandon it. The saying "no pain, no gain" is even more dangerous for kids than for adults.

- Avoid “Little League Syndrome.” A strong emphasis on winning, usually by the parents, creates undue tension and anxiety in youngsters. Teach children to compete against themselves, not others. Emphasize that improvement is a reward in itself.
- It is important to stimulate an early interest in aerobic activities. If this type of exercise is started early on in life, there is a much greater chance that it will become a lifelong habit. Swimming, walking, and cycling are good aerobic choices.
- Encourage physical fitness by turning the television and computer off and giving kids unstructured playtime.

Do yourself and your kids a favour by adopting a healthier lifestyle. This will allow you or your children to live a longer, healthier, and more fulfilling life. Remember, without their health, they have nothing.