



Cassara Consulting
"Your Neighborhood Nutritionists"

Dietitian - Nutritionist - Education - Counseling - Insurance Accepted



1345 Kuser Rd, Suite 5 - Hamilton, NJ 08619 - phone: (609) 585-8400 - visit us on the web at: www.cassaraconsulting.com - email: info@cassaraconsulting.com

Your Pre-Teen's Weight



bowdenimages/iStock/Getty Images Plus/Getty Images

Are you worried that your pre-teen may be gaining weight? A major growth spurt often occurs during the pre-teen (middle school) years. Every part of a child's body changes in size and proportion. Appetite increases, eating increases and often kids become heavier before their height takes off. The extra weight gain can concern parents. Should it?

More homework, computer time and snacking with less parental oversight of what's eaten and fewer kids playing sports can lead to weight gain. Add in their sense of uncertainty and cascade of emotional changes, and you have the perfect storm for weight issues.

How a parent deals with these changes is important. Done well, a parent establishes a solid foundation for a lifetime of healthy habits; if not, a child's relationship with food may suffer and even result in disordered eating problems.

Pinpointing if Weight Gain is a Concern

To determine if weight changes are worrisome, track a child's height and weight on their growth chart over time. With the help of your health care provider you can see if your child's growth is trending as expected or if a notable change has occurred that needs attention.

Easy Does It if Weight's an Issue

Resist focusing so much on food, nagging your child or making comments about their physical appearance. Research suggests that parents who try to keep their child thinner by restricting and restraining foods actually raise heavier kids. The following strategies will help your child establish lifestyle behaviors that support their healthy weight.

- **Schedule annual check-ups with your health care provider.** Review and discuss the trends of your child's growth chart together.
- **Talk with your health care provider before you go in for an appointment.** If you have concerns, talk by phone pre-appointment to discuss the best way to address the topic and best action plan for helping your child. Be on the same page. Keep the conversation in front of your child positive and constructive.
- **Establish a positive environment at home.**
- **Position changes as being for the whole family** vs. calling out special foods or actions for one child in particular. Everyone in the family benefits from a "new and improved" healthy home.
- **Practice the "division of responsibility" approach to feeding your family:** A parent's job is to determine which foods are available and served at home, when they'll be served and where they're served. It's a child's responsibility to decide if and how much to eat of those foods.
- **Stock your home with primarily healthful (tasty) foods.** Make them easy to get to – and make them enticing. Celery sticks won't do it for many kids, but jicama or sugar snap peas with hummus or a zesty yogurt dip might. Juicy fruits, crispy vegetables, hearty whole-grain crackers and cereals are wonderful grab-and-go foods.
- **Walk the talk.** Set some guidelines for snacking (steering clear of snacks close to meal times) and how much time can be spent on the computer or watching television. Be sure to model healthy behaviors as well. Eat healthful foods in front of your kids; weave physical activity into the errands and leisure things you do together.
- **Have calm, enjoyable sit-down family meals.** There is a direct correlation between eating together as a family and healthful lifestyle habits in kids. Happy family meals offer structure, support and a good opportunity to connect with your kids.
- **Convey a positive body image.** How you feel about your body influences how kids feel about theirs. If you have a positive body image, your kids will see that. If you don't, they know that too. In the best interest of their health, don't talk negatively about your own body in front of children.

Reviewed November 2019 by Esther Ellis, MS, RDN, LDN. Published December 3, 2019. To learn more healthy tips, visit www.eatright.org and consult a registered dietitian nutritionist. Info obtained from www.eatright.org.