

America's population is growing – fatter

America's children are getting fatter, and Needham is not immune. A consequence of children getting heavier and is that they are suffering from adult diseases such as adult onset diabetes, high cholesterol and high blood pressure. These are serious lifelong health concerns, which can often be avoided with better nutrition.

There are a variety of reasons why the weight of Americans is rising. One is that in our fast-moving lives, processed foods (which tend to be larger portions than we need, high in calories and artery clogging fat) are consumed in large quantities, while fresh homemade foods are becoming a thing of the past. Secondly, most people (especially children) do not get enough exercise as we are often parked in front of a television, computer or video game screen for many hours, not moving. We tend to drive our cars rather than walk to school, the stores or even our friends' houses. Family mealtime is going by the wayside. Individual family members eat at different times, eating whatever they can heat up, "drive- thru" or eat quickly.

Some simple suggestions

For those who have small children, it is easiest to establish good habits from the start - IT IS NEVER TOO LATE TO IMPROVE YOUR NUTRITION! A good place to start is to focus on everyday challenges and how to find healthier alternatives. For example:

Instead of non-nutritious, processed foods such as:

"Fruit" snacks. (These snacks, which are marketed heavily to kids, contain little or no real fruit and so much added sugar that they more closely resemble candy than fruit.)

Try:

- ✚ A real piece of fruit, such as a peach, nectarine, plum, grapes, melon or mango. What could be easier, just throw the whole fruit or a few cut up pieces into a lunchbox or backpack? Remember that young children may not finish a whole piece of fruit. Don't let this discourage you. Small children have smaller tummies and will finish the rest later.
- ✚ Dried fruit, such as apricots, peaches, apple rings or raisins.

Instead of:

Pre-made lunches in a box

Try:

- ✚ Turkey and cheese roll-up (with or without bread) *

- ✚ Peanut or Soy butter & jelly or banana sandwich
- ✚ Hard boiled eggs *
- ✚ Bagel with light cream cheese, a slice of cheese and tomato/cucumber, soy butter and jelly or egg/chicken salad *
- ✚ Plain beans (pinto, kidney, garbanzo, edamame) *
- ✚ Leftover tortellini/pasta *
- ✚ Yogurt with crushed pineapple or any fruit & granola (or plain) *
- ✚ Soup (heated and put in a Thermos) *
- ✚ Home-made pasta salad (made with assorted vegetables, chicken, beans and light dressing) *
- ✚ Bag of low-sugar cereal (Kix, Cheerios, Chex, etc)
- ✚ Leftover pizza *
- ✚ English muffin half with spaghetti sauce and grated cheese or shredded mozzarella *
- ✚ Whole wheat tortilla spread with refried beans and salsa, sprinkled with grated cheese and rolled *
- ✚ Rice or popcorn cakes spread with peanut / soy butter or jelly
- ✚ Carrot, colored bell pepper slices, jicama, grape tomatoes and celery sticks with a dip. (A dip can be a low-fat or fat-free dressing, plain yogurt or low-fat sour cream mixed with a dip or soup mix).

Note: Pre-packaged cut up vegetables with dip are available in the supermarket. Even though you pay for the convenience, your money is better spent on this rather than the high priced, high fat/calorie, low nutrition pre-made lunches.

Instead of:

Granola bars. (These bars should really be called candy bars due to their high calorie, sugar and artery clogging fat content.)

Try:

- ✚ Rice cakes (mini or large). There are a few different brands on the market that come in delicious flavors. These are a good "crunchy" snack for kids, without the high calories and fat.
- ✚ Homemade air- or kettle- popped popcorn (with grated cheese optional)
- ✚ Cheese (cheese sticks or cubes) *
- ✚ Pudding *
- ✚ "GORP" mix: low-sugar cereal, pretzels, raisins/craisins, other dried fruit, peanuts or other nuts (if child is not allergic)
- ✚ Applesauce
- ✚ Celery sticks with cream cheese or peanut / soy butter, topped with shredded carrots or raisins *

Instead of:

Soda or juice drinks.

Try:

- ✚ 1% or skim milk
- ✚ Water
- ✚ 100% juice (calcium fortified if possible)
- ✚ Half juice/half seltzer (tastes like really great soda!)

Note: By using these drink alternatives, your kids will get more nutrition, rather than the "empty" and high calorie soda's and juice drinks they may be consuming now. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children ages 1-6 years old should choose 100% juice but limit intake to 4-6 ounces a day and children 7-18 years limit to 8-12 ounces a day. Excessive juice (even 100% juice), juice drinks, and soda intake can lead to many negative health consequences in children and adults, one being overweight.

** Some of the above options will need to be sent to school in an insulated bag with an ice pack or a thermos.*

Making one easy change in your family's diet can make a huge difference. This will be your first step to becoming a healthier family.