

# **Pediatric Endocrinology Associates**

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## **From the Doctor's Desk**

### **Parents of Preschoolers: Let's Talk About Weight**

With the overwhelming reports in the media about the growing rate of childhood obesity, it appears that some parents of preschoolers and their physicians are reluctant to talk about weight. Reports indicate that pediatricians may be concerned about offending parents and that parents may not perceive their youngster as being overweight or that “baby fat is cute.” In lieu of the fact that overweight children are at risk for developing Type 2 Diabetes and heart disease, as well as obesity as an adult, the time has come to bridge the communication gap on preschool weight.

Researchers at the University of South Florida and Johns Hopkins University conducted a study in which one in three preschoolers were overweight or obese. More than half of the parents of the children with obesity reported that their child's weight was “about right.” Eighty-nine percent of overweight children and 45% of the parents of obese children underestimated their child's weight. The vast majority of the parents in the study reported that they would value their pediatrician's advice about the problem. Weight, although it may be an uncomfortable subject, is an essential part of monitoring childhood growth and development, as well as risk for adult disease. Now that it's out in the open, let's talk about your child's weight!

### **Balanced Diet and Nutrition**

The food that you eat can directly affect your health. As Americans are facing higher rates of obesity, diabetes, cancer, and cardiovascular disease, it is more important than ever to make sure that you and your family are eating a well balanced diet. There are plenty of fad diet products on the market, and it can be difficult to determine what exactly a well balanced diet is. A well balanced diet consists of the nutritional elements that your body needs to function properly and maintain a healthy weight. The specific elements for a well balanced diet may be different for everyone, but are composed of the same basic food elements.

My pyramid ([www.mypyramid.gov](http://www.mypyramid.gov)) is a helpful food guide that you can use to develop your nutrition plan. The U.S. Department of Agriculture created My Pyramid after researching the rising obesity rates in America. The My Pyramid food guide ensures that you eat the proper nutrients and calories each day to maintain a healthy weight. My Pyramid also contains exercise guidelines.

My Pyramid contains six food groups- grains, vegetables, fruit, oils, milk products, and meat and beans. You should eat foods from each group daily. My Pyramid provides portion size guidelines. For example, My Pyramid suggests that average adult eat 6oz. of grains, 2 ½ cups of vegetables, 2 cups of fruit, 3 cups of milk products, and 5 ½ oz. o meat and bean products each day, based on a 2,000 calorie diet. The exact portion size that you use depends on the amount of calories your body needs in one day. Your doctor or a nutritionist can recommend how many calories you need to meet o maintain your weight goal. The handy tools at the My Pyramid website can help your eating plan.

In addition to eating guidelines, My Pyramid provides recommendations for exercise. My Pyramid suggests that adults participate in physical activity for at least 30 minutes each day on most days of the week. My Pyramid suggests 60 minutes of physical activity per day to prevent weight gain. To sustain a weight loss, 60 to 90 minutes of physical activity each day may be necessary. Your doctor can make specific recommendations depending on your health status.

My Pyramid is a great place to start for developing your well balanced nutrition plan. You should always use your doctor as a resource for guidelines specific to you. Your doctor can make recommendations that are specific to controlling certain medical conditions. For example, there are food guidelines for diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol. Women's nutritional needs may change when they are pregnant or aging. Ask your doctor for a referral to a nutritionist for specific help with daily meal planning and recipe recommendations.

It is important to teach your children and family members about healthy eating. Make sure that everyone in your family is getting enough daily exercise. By doing so, you may reduce the risk of obesity and serious health concerns.

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