



IF PARENTS ARE SENSIBLE ABOUT FOOD, KIDS WILL BE, TOO

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The best way to prevent eating disorders in your child, say health professionals, is to encourage healthy eating habits and a strong self-image. They offer these tips:

- Teach your child to eat well-balanced meals. If you take care of your body and eat sensibly, your child probably will too.
- Discourage the idea that a particular diet or body size will automatically lead to happiness and fulfillment.
- Don't use food as reward or punishment. It sets up food as a potential weapon for control
- Don't constantly criticize your own shape – "I'm too fat; I've got to lose weight" – in front of your child. Such comments imply that one's appearance is more important than character.
- Don't equate food with positive or negative behaviour. The dieting parent who says she was "good" today because she "didn't eat much" implies that avoiding food is good behaviour. Similarly, "Don't eat that – it'll make you fat" implies that being fat makes one unlikable.
- Remember, a lot about size is in the genes and is out of your control. Encourage kids to appreciate the outward differences in people, and not to make personal judgements on appearances.
- Know that signs of an eating disorder can show up before puberty. A girl may start starving herself in anticipation of inevitable changes in shape well before she develops curves.
- Be aware of the warning signs. Your child may have a problem if: she regularly refuses typical family meals or skips lunch at school; she makes comments about being fat or an acquaintance who is "too fat"; shopping or clothes has become stressful because she's grown a size larger and doesn't want to face herself in a mirror; you see signs of secret dieting or secret bingeing; she begins to withdraw from her friends; or she becomes irritable and depressed.

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The Ontario Provincial Network of Eating Disorder Service Providers

10 Things Parents Can Do To Help Prevent Eating Disorders

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1. Examine the ways in which your beliefs and attitudes and behaviours about your own body and the bodies of others have been shaped by the forces of weightism and sexism. Then educate your children about (a) the genetic basis of difference in body types; and (b) the nature and ugliness of prejudice.
2. Examine closely your dreams and goals for your children and other loved ones. Are you overemphasizing beauty and body shape, particularly for girls?
 - a. avoid conveying an attitude which says in effect “I would like you more if you lose weight, don’t eat so much, look more like the slender models in the ads, fit into more slimmer clothes, etc.”
 - b. decide what you can do and stop doing to reduce teasing, criticism, blaming, staring, etc. that reinforce the vilification of overweight and the glorification of slenderness.
3. Learn about and discuss with your sons and daughters, (a) the dangers of trying to alter one’s body shape through dieting; (b) the value of moderate exercising toward stamina and cardiovascular fitness; and (c) the importance of eating a variety of foods in well-balanced meals consumed at least 3 times a day.
 - a. Avoid dichotomizing foods into “good/safe/no-fat or low-fat vs. bad/dangerous/fattening”.
 - b. Be a good role model in regard to sensible eating, sensible exercise, and self acceptance!
4. Make a commitment to exercise for the joy of feeling your body move and function effectively, not to purge fat from your body or compensate for calories eaten.
5. Make a commitment not to avoid activities (such as swimming, sunbathing, dancing) simply because they call attention to your weight and shape. Similarly, refuse to wear clothes that are uncomfortable or that you dislike, simply because they divert attention from weight or shape.
6. Practice taking people in general and women in particular, seriously for what they say, feel, and do, not for how slender or “well put together” they appear.”
7. Make a commitment to help children (both male and female) appreciate and resist the ways in which television, magazines, and other media distort the true diversity of human body types and imply that a slender body means power, excitement, and sexuality.
8. Make a commitment to educating boys about the various forms of violence against women, including weightism, and their responsibilities for preventing it.
9. Encourage your children to be active and to enjoy what their bodies can do and feel like. Do not limit their caloric intake unless a physician requests that you do this because of a medical problem.
10. Do whatever you can to promote the self-esteem and self-respect of your daughters and nieces, and sisters in intellectual, athletic, and social endeavours. Give boys and girls the same opportunities and encouragement. Be careful not to suggest that females are less important than males, e.g., by exempting males from housework and childcare. A well-rounded self and solid self-esteem are perhaps the best antidotes to mindless dieting and disordered eating.

