

helping OVERWEIGHT CHILDREN

As many as 25 per cent of Australian children are overweight. Catherine Saxelby gives parents 20 tips to help their children fight fat.



1 Clean up your act

Set a good example by eating well yourself. Research shows the eating habits of parents are closely related to the weight of their children.

2 Rewards

Don't use food as a reward for good behaviour.

3 Meal sizes

Young kids need to eat small amounts of food and often, but that doesn't mean they should graze all day long. Stick to regular meals with a small snack in between.

4 Drink more water

Make water the main family drink with meals. Cordials, fruit juices and soft drinks are high in sugar and too easy to have too much of.

5 Respect your child's appetite

Your child's appetite will vary so allow them to determine how much they need to eat. By forcing them to eat more, they lose the ability to know how much is enough.

6 Limit junk food

Don't buy junk food. Keep it for special occasions.

7 Turn off the TV

The evidence is overwhelming – too much TV helps to make our kids overweight! Experts recommend TV viewing should be limited to a maximum of one hour a day.

8 Monitor school food

Find out what's available at school. If they're aren't many healthy alternatives, limit tuckshop to once a week.

9 Think long-term

Don't expect rapid weight loss. It often takes a year for your child to slim down.

10 Snack right

Much of the reason for kids' weight problems is that 'snack foods' are not suitable snacks – they're loaded with fat, sugar or salt.

11 Get active

Head outdoors to kick a ball in the backyard, go cycling or visit the park – anything to get kids moving. Have fun!

12 Go low-fat

If your child is two or older, low-fat milk, yoghurt and cheese are suitable.

13 Don't skip brekkie

Overweight people tend to skip breakfast. Get your kids into the good habit of eating breakfast early on.

14 Breastfeed

Breastfeed your child if you can as this has been shown to protect against weight issues later in life.

15 Strike a balance

Don't ban any food completely. By forbidding foods, you only make them more desirable.

16 Bust a move

Make an effort to include physical activity in your child's life. Putting your child in charge of walking the dog every day is a good start.

17 Tread carefully

Don't make derogatory comments about your child's weight or shape or they may start to label themselves, thinking "I'm a fat pig". This will not do them any favours.

Best snacks for kids

- Fruit and fruit-based snacks
- Yoghurt
- Bread, toast, toasted muffins or crumpets
- Breakfast cereal and milk
- Milkshake or smoothie with low-fat milk
- Baked beans or canned spaghetti
- Popcorn (pan-popped, not microwaved)
- Corn on the cob
- Noodles (low-fat, not instant)

18 Slow down

If your schedule is so busy you often have to resort to high-fat takeaway dinners, you need to slow down. A home-cooked meal is better for everyone.

19 Be positive

There's lots of yummy foods your child CAN eat like fruit, breads, cereals, yoghurt, meat and eggs. Don't dwell on what they CAN'T eat.

20 Eating to cope

Look at when and why your child eats. Is he/she unhappy or stressed? Are they being teased at school? Kids, like adults, use food to cope with difficult times or to fill a void – it may be the reason they're too heavy.