

PART ONE

**ASSESSING YOUR
CHILD'S NUTRITION
STATUS**



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IS MY CHILD HEALTHY? *Looking at Your Child's Eating Habits and Weight*

How many times have you questioned the eating habits of your child? It's second nature for a parent to worry—worry about how much milk Johnny drinks, or how many daily snacks Melanie eats, or even how often David eats fast food each week.

What makes children poor eaters? What makes children healthy eaters? What makes them gain or lose weight? We'll get into that, but let's first try to assess your overall nutrition knowledge and your child's nutritional status. With this information you can determine what specific nutrition concerns you need to concentrate on and establish a course of action.

To start, let's check your basic nutrition IQ.

Nutrition IQ: What Do You Know?

1. Your mom always told you to drink your milk. How much milk should your teenager be drinking each day?
 - a. one serving
 - b. two servings
 - c. three or more servings
2. You know that calcium is important. Which of these foods supply calcium in the diet?
 - a. milk
 - b. yogurt
 - c. green, leafy vegetables

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- d. sardines
 - e. all of the above
3. It's time for an afternoon snack. Which is your best choice?
- a. potato chips
 - b. frozen yogurt cone
 - c. candy bar
 - d. sunflower seeds
4. Your child is involved in outdoor sports. It's hot and dry outside. Which is the best beverage to keep on hand?
- a. soft drink
 - b. sweetened sports drink
 - c. water
5. Fiber is important in the diet. Which of the following foods best contribute fiber?
- a. carrot sticks
 - b. apple
 - c. whole wheat crackers
 - d. raisin bran cereal
 - e. all of the above
6. You want to keep extra pounds from creeping on. What's the best plan of action?
- a. seek the latest quick weight loss plan
 - b. eat healthy foods
 - c. skip meals
 - d. remove all fat from your diet
7. One day your ten-year-old daughter declares her intention to become a vegetarian. What snack food would contribute the greatest amount of protein?
- a. string cheese
 - b. apple
 - c. vanilla wafers
 - d. popcorn
8. You're running to soccer practice and there's no time to make dinner. Fast food appears to be the only option tonight. What's the most nutritious choice?
- a. taco salad
 - b. hamburger

- c. tuna salad sub sandwich
- d. pepperoni personal pan pizza

Answers:

1. c. Teens require as much as 1,300 mg. of calcium/day, and that can be obtained in 3 to 4 servings of milk.
2. e. All of these foods would contribute calcium to the diet.
3. b. A frozen yogurt cone is your healthiest choice, being lowest in fat. Potato chips, candy, and even sunflower seeds supply more fat and less nutrition.
4. c. Water is the best choice to rehydrate the body and replace fluids lost through sweating.
5. e. All of these foods contribute fiber to the diet and are wise choices.
6. b. Eating healthy food choices can help you maintain and even lose weight in the long run without feeling deprived of food. Fad dieting, skipping meals, and eliminating fat can all lead to additional food and nutrition problems.
7. a. Although any of those listed would be good snack options, string cheese supplies the greatest amount of protein at 7.0 grams/stick.
8. b. A hamburger with lettuce, tomatoes, onions, or any other vegetable would be the best option, supplying the least amount of fat and calories. A single hamburger weighs in at 260 calories and 9 grams of fat, while each of the other options supplies between 500 and 900 calories and 28 to 52 grams of fat.

How well did you do? Nutrition is so important it should be a big part of our lives and those of our children. Good health is a prized possession. It cannot be bought, only acquired from good habits. But good habits are *years* in the making. Many times a person's health is taken for granted until a diagnosis to the contrary occurs. When this happens, it then becomes necessary to stop, take notice, and do what it takes to gain a healthy status again. But by then it may be too late. Children are rarely concerned with their future health; it's something they take for granted. They just assume that they will feel good forever, and live to a ripe old age. But as parents, we know otherwise. That's why we, as parents, need to give guidance to our children and set examples by establishing and maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

Fortunately, times have never presented us with better opportunities for obtaining good health. We know more now than ever before about what promotes good health and what contributes to health prob-

lems. We can use this knowledge to make choices to promote our own and our children's overall health and wellbeing, and delay and even prevent the onset of disease. This information is available to anyone who chooses to seek it, and we would be foolish to overlook what is so widely available to us.

We also know that people develop food habits early in life. Habits formed before the age of six are likely to continue through the years and have the maximum effect on overall health and quality of life. Parents, peers, and environmental surroundings all contribute to these eating patterns and behaviors, so you should start focusing right now on improving your child's eating habits and food choices.

FOODNOTE

Healthy habits established early in life are the foundation of good health throughout life.

Is My Child Eating Healthy?

Here we want you to analyze how you and your child are doing in terms of your eating habits each day.

How Well Do You Eat? How Well Does Your Child Eat?

Choose an answer from each of the following groupings that best pertains to you; then the answer that pertains to your child.

- a. I (my child) eat/eats as much as 6 to 11 servings of whole grain breads, cereals, crackers, rice, or pasta daily.
 - b. I (my child) choose/chooses whole grain products at least 3 to 5 times per week.
 - c. I (my child) prefer/prefers white bread over whole wheat and typically eats 1 to 3 servings daily.
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- a. I (my child) eat/eats 3 or more vegetables daily.
 - b. I (my child) eat/eats 1 or 2 vegetables daily.
 - c. I (my child) choose/chooses a salad occasionally with dinner.
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- a. I (my child) eat/eats 2 or 3 fruits daily.
 - b. I (my child) eat/eats 1 fruit each day.

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EATING RIGHT FROM 8 TO 18

- c. Occasionally, I (my child) snack/snacks on a banana or some grapes, but rarely eat/eats fruit otherwise.
- a. I (my child) eat/eats lean meat, poultry, fish, dried beans or tofu 2 or 3 times daily.
- b. I (my child) choose/chooses lean meat products 1 or 2 times weekly.
- c. I (my child) prefer/prefers hamburgers, fried chicken, or steak over lean meat products.
- a. I (my child) eat/eats 2 or 3 servings of low-fat dairy products (milk, yogurt, cheese) daily.
- b. I (my child) sometimes choose/chooses low-fat dairy products and sometimes whole milk and ice cream.
- c. I (my child) would choose whole milk and regular ice cream over low-fat milk and frozen yogurt.
- a. I (my child) exercise/exercises at least 3 times weekly for at least 30 minutes each time.
- b. I (my child) exercise/exercises once or twice a week for 20 to 30 minutes.
- c. I (my child) occasionally walk/walks for exercise.

Number of "a" answers

Myself _____ $\times 3 =$ _____ My Child _____ $\times 3 =$ _____

Number of "b" answers

Myself _____ $\times 2 =$ _____ My Child _____ $\times 2 =$ _____

Number of "c" answers

Myself _____ $\times 1 =$ _____ My Child _____ $\times 1 =$ _____

Now add up the points for yourself, and then for your child.

If you (or your child) scored . . .

Total of 15 to 18 points, you (or your child) are doing great with your eating and exercise habits. Keep up the good work.

Total of 11 to 14 points, you (or your child) could use a little improvement. You need to add more variety into your choices, watch fat intake, and increase regular exercise habits.

Total of 10 or less points, you (or your child) need some help and guidance. By following the suggestions and guidance found in this book, you can begin to move in the right direction. Good luck!!

We all can benefit from learning all we can about nutrition and its effect on health. The science of nutrition is constantly changing, and children go through so many changes . . . all of which are a part of growing up.

These enormous transitions all tie in with lifestyle habits, and nutrition is a big part of this picture. Babies grow at a tremendous rate, doubling their weight in five months and tripling it in a year. Although they grow at a somewhat slower pace, our toddlers, preschoolers, and school-aged kids continue to grow rapidly in front of our eyes. But somewhere between the ages of fifteen and eighteen children enter their final major growth spurt. Here Mother Nature helps them grow into their adult bodies. For boys, adding extra muscle and increased blood volume is standard. For girls, collecting some extra fat padding (most likely in undesirable places) is likely. Sometimes these changes are not what our children have in mind for their own shapes and bodies, so they try to force Mother Nature's plans on a different course. Boys often overeat to bulk up, while girls may choose to undereat in order to stay slim. Neither is a good choice and both can lead to health problems in later years. Eating right and making wise food choices are important to properly feeding and fueling the body. To do so, a good, positive attitude about food is a must, along with eating a variety of foods that build and nourish the body properly.

As children grow and seek greater independence, they sometimes use food as a bargaining or negotiating tool. Food and healthy eating often become control issues. This is often the case with eating disorders, vegetarianism, and overweight conditions. Teens and young adults not only receive conflicting messages about foods they eat and don't eat (some good and others not so good), they know that their parents are affected by their food intake. It's especially easy for young people to grow up with unhealthy feelings about foods as they receive so many mixed messages about how much they should weigh, how they should look, and where they can get the perfect body.

FOODNOTE

Good eating habits are *just as easy* to create as bad ones are!

Our responsibility as parents lies in what we *offer* our children to eat and what we make available to them. Ultimately, it's our children's responsibility to eat or not to eat; we can't force foods on them.

Reasons to Eat Healthy

- Eating healthy shows you care about your body and your health
- Eating healthy makes you feel good, giving you energy to work, play, and feel your best

- Eating healthy gives you the opportunity to think more clearly for yourself
 - Eating healthy helps your immediate family, extended family, and future generations learn to eat right as well
 - Eating healthy builds good attitudes about foods and reduces the likelihood of future eating problems
 - Eating healthy gives you a positive outlook on life
 - Eating healthy sets the foundation for a lifetime of health and reduction of disease
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As children move from childhood to adulthood, they encounter many changes. Sometimes their bodies grow so fast they are not quite comfortable with their physical and emotional selves. It takes several years to understand all of the changes. Growth spurts, acne problems, hormone changes, menstruation in girls, and putting up a fight for independence are just some of the more common events preteens and teenagers go through. It is important to reassure your child that these changes are normal—and you can start by knowing, and informing, your children about what's a healthy weight for them.

What's a Healthy Weight for My Child?

A weight chart alone cannot determine a healthy weight. So many of us have had the unpleasant experience of being weighed, or watching our child being weighed, at the doctor's office and being told we, or our child, weigh too much for our height, according to the chart on the wall. This method is outdated. The chart does not take into account muscle weight versus fat weight.

There is a difference between being muscular, being overweight, and being obese. Obesity indicates that a person has excess body fat. Being overweight could mean a person is obese, but it could also indicate that one has a large muscle mass. Most athletes are overweight because of their muscles, not because they have too much body fat. This can also be true for active teen athletes. Thus the weight charts would not be appropriate indication of healthy weight for these teens.

When children visit their doctor, heights and weights are charted on graphs developed by the National Center for Health Statistics in collaboration with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Most

pediatricians will provide these charts in the child's medical records so they can be referenced through the growing years.

The charts on pages 10–11 illustrate the normal range of height and weight for American boys and girls up to eighteen years of age. Children's heights and weights are shown in percentiles. For example, a child of average height for a particular age would be in the fiftieth percentile; a tall child in the ninety-fifth percentile; a short child in the fifth percentile. Weight is treated in a similar manner. After plotting height and weight on these charts over a period of years, patterns emerge that show how your child may or may not be growing properly. But remember, these are just *guides* to follow—they don't tell the whole story.

After all, every child grows differently. One teenage boy may be the smallest in the class until he hits his fourteenth birthday; then he may shoot up to be the tallest. A young girl may hit her maximum growth by the time she reaches fifteen. Thus the preteen and teen years are important periods of growth and development. Nutritional requirements during this time frame are extremely important for building tissues, muscles, bones, blood volume, and much more.

As of June 1998, nutrition experts have devised another method to determine height and weight status of Americans. The National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute developed these guidelines in cooperation with the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases. Referred to as Body Mass Index or BMI, this easy-to-use method is based on gender, current weight, and height, and provides information on whether a person is at a healthy weight or is underweight or overweight. The charts, on pages 12–13, are different for boys and for girls. Please note the formula provided on the charts (in the upper left) so that you can calculate your child's BMI.

The following indicates whether your child is at a healthy weight or not:

Healthy weight = BMI of 19–24.9

Overweight = BMI of 25–29.9

Obese = BMI of 30 or more

In terms of percentiles:

Underweight BMI-for-age \leq 5th percentile

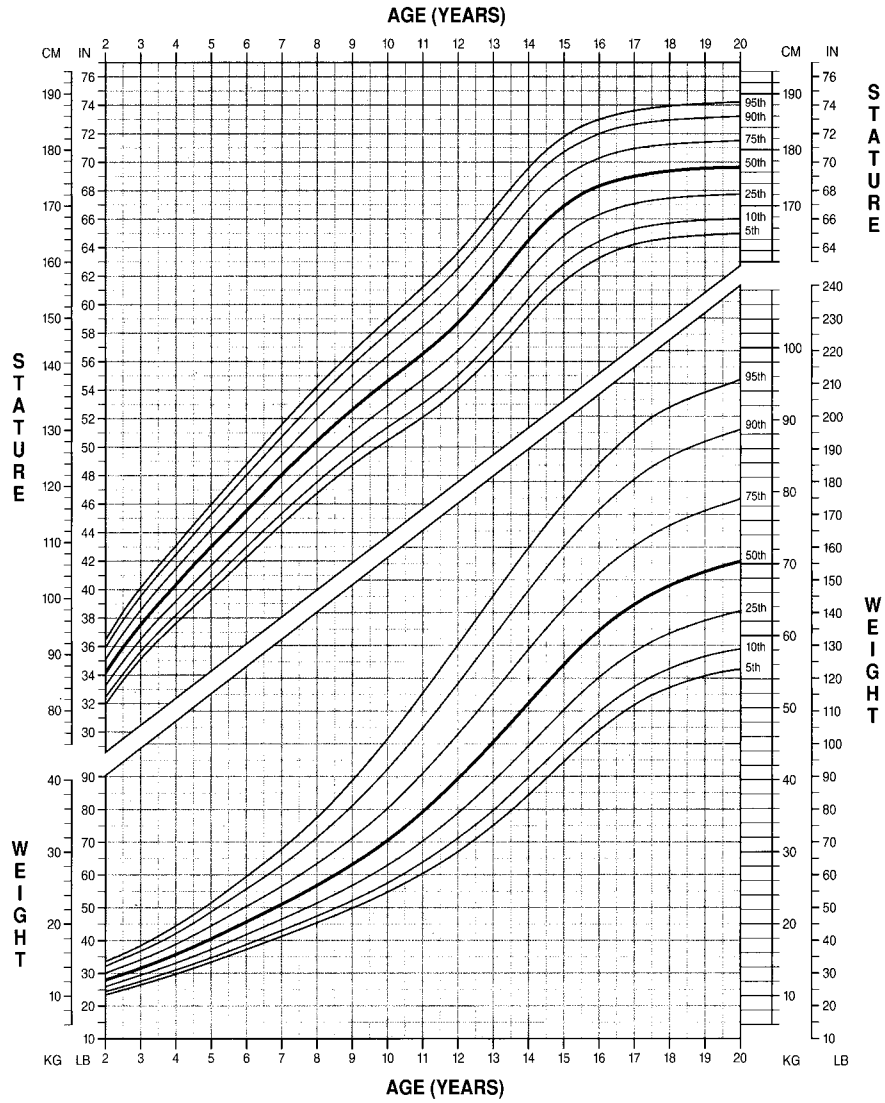
At risk of overweight BMI-for-age \geq 85th percentile

Overweight BMI-for-age \geq 95th percentile

(continued on page 14)

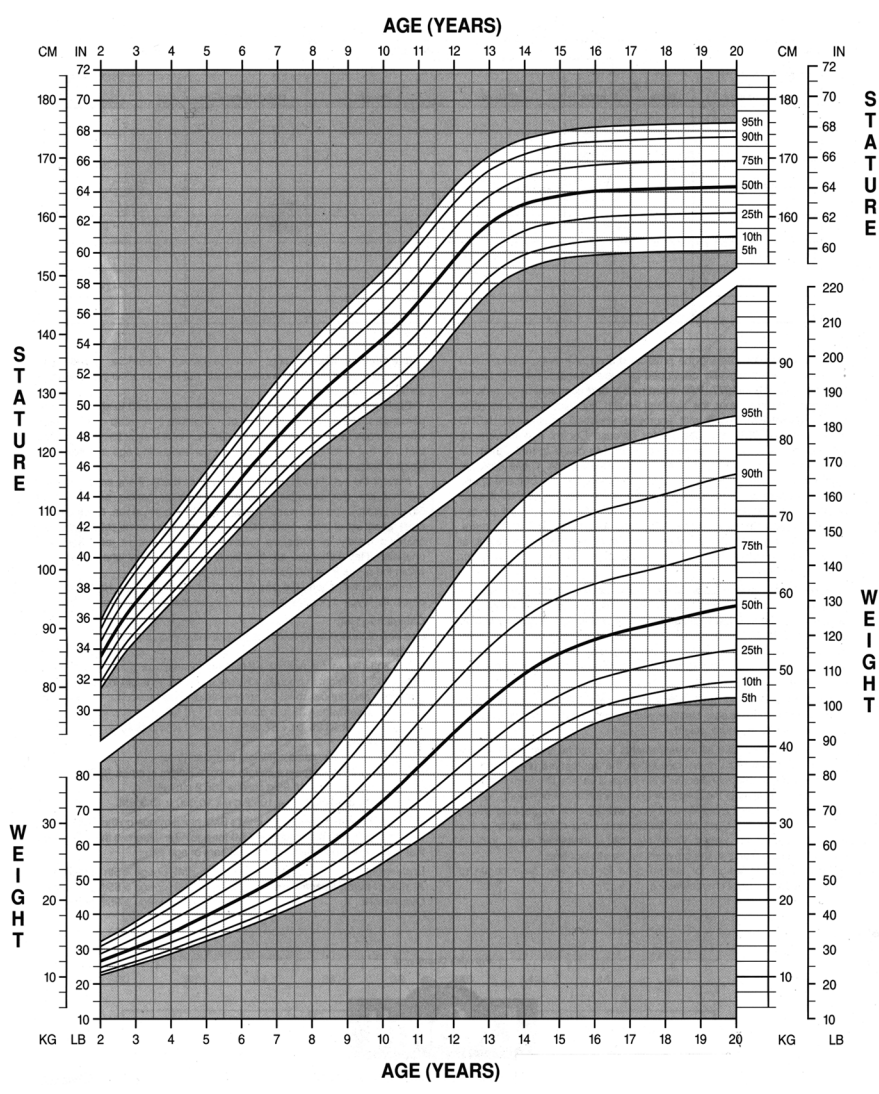
Growth Chart for Boys

2 to 20 Years: Boys' Stature and Weight for Age



Growth Chart for Girls

2 to 20 Years: Girls' Stature and Weight for Age



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These standards are generous, yet the rate of obesity in our children has risen drastically from 5 percent in 1964 to almost 13 percent in 1994, with further increases into the new millennium.

Now look at the table to determine where your child's weight falls. If your child's weight falls into the normal range or slightly above normal, you do not need to be overly concerned. But, if you see a trend toward a higher BMI or if your child is gaining weight too quickly, you should seek further knowledge on healthy eating.

However, some doctors feel that even though BMI is important in helping determine if a child is at risk of being overweight, it may be better for parents to look for practical warning signs that their child may or may not have a weight problem. Parents can ask themselves the following questions: *Does my child get short of breath easily during exercise? Does my child's weight get in the way of social or physical events? Does my child wear clothing to hide her weight?* If you, as a parent, answer "yes" to these types of questions, you need to seek guidance on dealing with these weight-related issues and you'll want to concentrate on Part Two of this book.

FOODNOTE

Studies show the earlier one starts dieting (childhood vs. adolescence vs. adulthood), the higher one's weight becomes in adulthood.

Determining if a young person is underweight is often more difficult. Visual assessment by a parent or close friend sometimes helps in spotting an underweight child. Generally, a growth chart in the child's medical record can be helpful. If the child's weight seems to have taken a drastic dive downward at any point, and his or her height stops increasing, this can be a sign of excessive weight loss and possible slowed growth. If the chart shows a large difference (as determined by the physician) between weight and height, this can be a sign of disproportionate weight for height.

The possibility of an eating disorder needs to be considered when there is an extreme weight loss (25 percent of the original weight), amenorrhea (loss of menstrual cycle) in girls, preoccupation with dieting, fear of becoming fat, no known illness leading to weight loss, and/or refusal to maintain a normal weight. Many times, eating disorders are tied into a person's body image.

Body image is the way someone views how his or her body looks. It also includes what people believe others think about their appearance. Often, body image reflects people's general feelings about themselves. Sometimes, it's easier to focus on weight than on more serious problems. It's more acceptable in our society to say, "I feel fat" than "I'm depressed."

FOODNOTE

Too many kids base their looks and body size on their primary sense of self-worth.

Most girls and boys between the ages of eight to eighteen years are very concerned with the physical changes that occur to them. Adolescence is a time of rapid growth and physical change. Teens have not grown this fast since infancy and will not grow this rapidly again the rest of their lives. In addition, teens go through puberty, which can last anywhere from two to six years. Puberty brings hormones, which bring many bodily changes. Some of these changes can be uncomfortable and may take time to get used to. Yet teens want to be just the right height and weight, have the right look, and develop "normally" sexually. They don't want to stand out in a crowd. Teens often feel that being fat or thin will determine how smart they are, if they'll have friends, and even if they'll be successful in life.

Girls, in particular, spend a great deal of their adolescence reading teen and fashion magazines and comparing themselves to models and TV stars. Through these media, they learn about the newest diet trend, diet aid, diet pill, and techniques such as vomiting and laxative use to keep the weight off. Unfortunately, being thin and attractive becomes a greater priority than their health.

FOODNOTE

About 10 percent of eating disorders start before the age of 10; 33 percent between the ages of eleven and fifteen; and more than 50 percent between the ages of sixteen and twenty.

Young people are even starting to worry about their weight earlier and earlier. Studies have shown that by fourth and fifth grades as many

as 80 percent of the girls have already been on a diet to lose weight. But girls do not own this world of body image problems. Boys, too, are self-conscious about how they look. Where girls may want to be pencil thin, boys want to be muscular and buff.

FOODNOTE

If the measurements of a Barbie doll were projected to a life-size woman, she would have a 36-inch bust, 18-inch waist, and 33-inch hips. A life-size G. I. Joe would have 27-inch biceps. In other words, models of unrealistic body images are being presented to our children.

Constant reassurance needs to be given to our kids to emphasize that they are “OK” and that the differences they see between themselves and their friends are normal. Their feelings regarding their fatness or thinness are often unrealistic. It’s important to encourage your child not to go on a weight loss diet, but instead to learn how to eat healthier. You’ll find out how in the following pages.