

SUMMARY - Eating in a Weight-Obsessed World:

Helping Your Child Have a Healthy Body Image and a Healthy Weight

Speaker: Dianne Neumark-Sztainer, PhD., MPH

Held Monday, October 1, 2007

"Healthy Bodies and Healthy Body Image" was the message of the first Edina PCN forum of the 2007-2008 school year. Dr. Neumark-Sztainer reaffirmed that the goal is not only for our children to have a healthy body, but **accept their bodies**.

Dr. Neumar-Sztainer presented her four cornerstones to gauge both of these goals: body image, healthy eating, healthy weight and physical activity. There is a wide range on the spectrum from excellent to poor.

She suggested that parents review this spectrum and pinpoint the areas that may need improvement. For example, if the child is of a healthy weight, body image and physical activity but has poor eating habits, then the parents can begin to look at this one component and make small changes to improve the eating habits.

Healthy eating is lots of fruits and vegetables, little sweets, eating when hungry and stopping when full. Parents should not strive for "perfection" in eating habits. Dianne suggested the 80/20 rule. Meals and snacks should be healthy 80% of the time. If you forbid junk food, it will become too tempting. Healthy physical activity is moderate activity, enjoyment of the activity and regularly engaging in the activity. If you encourage your child to participate in an activity that he or she is not interested in, the frequency will wane quickly. If there are no activities that your child is interested in, encourage family walks. This will connect your family physically and emotionally.

Parents are up against an environment that sends many conflicting messages. Portion sizes are large and much of the food available is not very nutritious. There is less physical activity (i.e., less physical education time). Girls are encouraged to be very thin and boys very muscular. Half of all teenage girls are unhappy with their bodies and one third of teens are overweight. If adolescents have a negative self-image, then they are more likely to not eat healthy or engage in physical activity.

In order to improve or create a healthy body image, the presenter suggested that you avoid discussing weight. Remind family members that bodies come in all shapes and sizes. These are some things parents/families can do:

- Do more/say less
- Model healthy eating/regular exercise (but not perfect!)
- Provide an environment that makes it easy for the child to make healthy choices
- Focus less on weight/more on behaviors
- Listen in a supportive environment
- Have zero tolerance for weight-teasing!
- Eat family meals
- Keep mealtime free of major conflicts

Families have a great deal of responsibility but they do not operate in isolation. Parents can try to make changes to have a healthier home base and reinforce positive influences. Take one healthy step at a time!!