

We all need a bit of extra help when it comes to our children's health and so we present some top tips from Dr Campbell.

by Dr Ian W Campbell

- Start by believing that when it comes to a healthy lifestyle, **“You are what you eat”**. This applies just as much to your children. Healthy hearts, bones, teeth and minds starts with a healthy diet. Being a healthy weight isn't just about preventing future health problems, it's about feeling and looking better right now.
- Lead by example. If it's good for your kids, it's good for you too. Your son or daughter is much more likely to go along with it if they see you doing it too. And meal times will be a lot simpler cooking for the whole family together.
- **Think always about a healthy diet, not weight loss.** If your child is overweight it's often better to concentrate on preventing further weight gain. As they grow taller, their weight will slim down gradually.
- Keep it simple. Don't attempt too much too soon. Often the most productive changes are the first few you make. For example just switching from normal fizzy drinks to water or zero-calorie drinks and from a daily packet of crisps to a piece of fruit each day can achieve amazing results.
- Aim to give your child **at least 5 portions of fruit and veg every day**. It might mean one piece daily to begin with. Choose fruit and veg your child likes. In time build it up till you achieve at least five portions daily
- Nothing should be banned! Favourite foods, sweets, chocs, drinks and snacks are not bad. But too many and too often can be. Banning them completely leads to resentment and rebellion! Maybe make it a weekend or occasional treat
- Try not to use food as a reward, or punishment. If we learn to associate sweet foods with comfort where do we turn every time we have a bad experience? A healthy attitude to food is a must. Reward good behaviour with praise, recognition within the family, or healthy snacks.
- If you're lucky enough to go out for meals with your kids use it as an opportunity to discuss with them how to make healthier choices, or maybe specify smaller portions. Don't be afraid to ask the waiter to avoid fatty cream sauces for example. A good restaurant will respond to your wishes!
- **Make exercise a daily part of family life.** Increased physical activity is a must for health, wellbeing and weight control. Find fun things to do as a family. Bike rides, walks in the park, a garden trampoline (with safety net) or swimming for example. Your kids might complain at first but they'll soon learn they enjoy the activity and spending time with mum and dad.
- If you're concerned about a health issue, or how to approach weighty issues with your children ask for help! **Speak to your GP, nurse or health visitor and take professional advice.**