

Cooperative Extension

Overweight Youth: A Target for Bullying

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The number of overweight children in the United States is growing at a distressing rate, with 1 out of 3 kids now considered overweight or obese. Serious “adult” health problems like asthma, type II diabetes, high blood pressure and sleep apnea are widespread in overweight children. This health issue becomes broader for children and their families when they are bullied by other children because they are overweight. The American Psychological Association states “Obesity, and the mental health disorders to which it contributes, should be considered as serious as other medical illnesses”. Consequences faced by bullied, overweight or obese children include depression, drug and alcohol abuse, low self-esteem, poor body image and suicide.

Our culture emphasizes slimness. Anything different than the pop culture body image, is treated as abnormal, or worse, wrong. According to the Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity at Yale University, “these messages are so common in television, film, magazines and advertising that it has become socially acceptable to stigmatize people who are overweight”. We have misconceptions and, as a result, overweight children are often treated differently. For example, they may look older and therefore a teacher may expect them to behave like older children. Often, people do not understand that the emotional trauma these children experience prevents them from doing anything to help their weight problem.



What is Bullying?

According to Stopbullying.gov, “Bullying is unwanted, aggressive behavior among school aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time”. Bullying is not harmless or “just a phase” that children need to “tough out”. It is not an accident. It happens every day and at any age. Bullying is aggressive behavior that is done with the intent of hurting someone, either emotionally or physically.

Many Forms of Bullying

There are multiple forms of bullying. They can include verbal, physical, relational, or cyber bullying. This includes name calling, hitting, kicking, spitting, tripping, threatening to cause harm, exclusion from a group, spreading rumors, humiliating in public, taking or breaking someone’s things, extorting money, harassing emails, calls, or text messages or use of social network websites to embarrass or tease. With increased technology, rumors and embarrassing pictures or text can be sent to millions of people in an instant. Bullying occurs as early as preschool, when overweight children are often the last to be chosen as playmates.



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Eat More Veggies, Fruits & Fiber and Weigh Less

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Most of us like to feel satisfied or “full” when we finish eating. Eating more vegetables, fruits, and whole grains will increase bulk in the diet to make meals more satisfying. Fruits and vegetables in pureed or chopped forms may be added to smoothies, quick breads, main dishes, or desserts. Try adding pumpkin puree to muffins or loaf bread and chopped zucchini or butternut squash to meat loaf or macaroni and cheese. Doing this cuts calories, adds bulk to your diet, and increases your fruit and vegetable intake. Most Americans do not eat enough vegetables or fruits. Here are some additional tips:

- **Pay attention to your hunger and feelings of fullness and stop eating when full.** Don't eat when you are not hungry. Be a mindful eater.
- **Add fruit and vegetables to traditional dishes** to stretch them by adding fiber which makes you feel more full and satisfied.
- **Start each main meal with a cup of vegetable soup or a side green salad.** Both add bulk but few calories. Remember to choose a low-fat salad dressing and use a small amount.
- **Use salsa as a dressing for salads or on a baked potato.** It adds vegetables to your diet and is low in calories as compared to other dressings like sour cream or creamy salad dressings.
- **Drink water** rather than juices or sweetened beverages at meals or in-between.
- **Fill half your lunch and dinner plate with fruits and vegetables.** Go online to Choose MyPlate.gov <http://www.choosemyplate.gov/> to learn more about preparing healthy meals and snacks.
- **Set a good example for children by eating fruit** everyday with meals or as snacks.



- **When eating out, order a salad or extra vegetable** rather than a starchy food.
- **Eat a high fiber, low calorie snack** like an apple before you go out to eat. Go into the restaurant feeling satisfied, not hungry and you will consume fewer calories overall.
- **For snacks, choose a high fiber fruit or vegetable and pair it with a low-fat dairy product.** For example, low-fat yogurt with fresh berries, or baby carrots and low-fat ranch dip. Keep snack calories to around 100 to 150. Snacks should improve your diet instead of just adding more fat, salt, sugar, or calories.
- **Explore different meal and snack patterns.** Choose a pattern that includes at least 2 cups of fruit and 2 ½ cups of vegetables each day. Eat more whole grains by substituting a whole-grain product for a refined product – such as eating whole-wheat bread instead of white bread or brown rice instead of white rice. It's important to substitute the whole-grain product for the refined one, rather than adding the whole-grain product.
- **Research has shown most of us eat the same amount of food by weight each day.** If you increase the water and bulk in your meals and snacks, you will eat a similar amount of food but fewer calories. In the end you will feel full and lose weight at the same time.



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Unit Pricing: It's an Easy Read at the Grocery Store

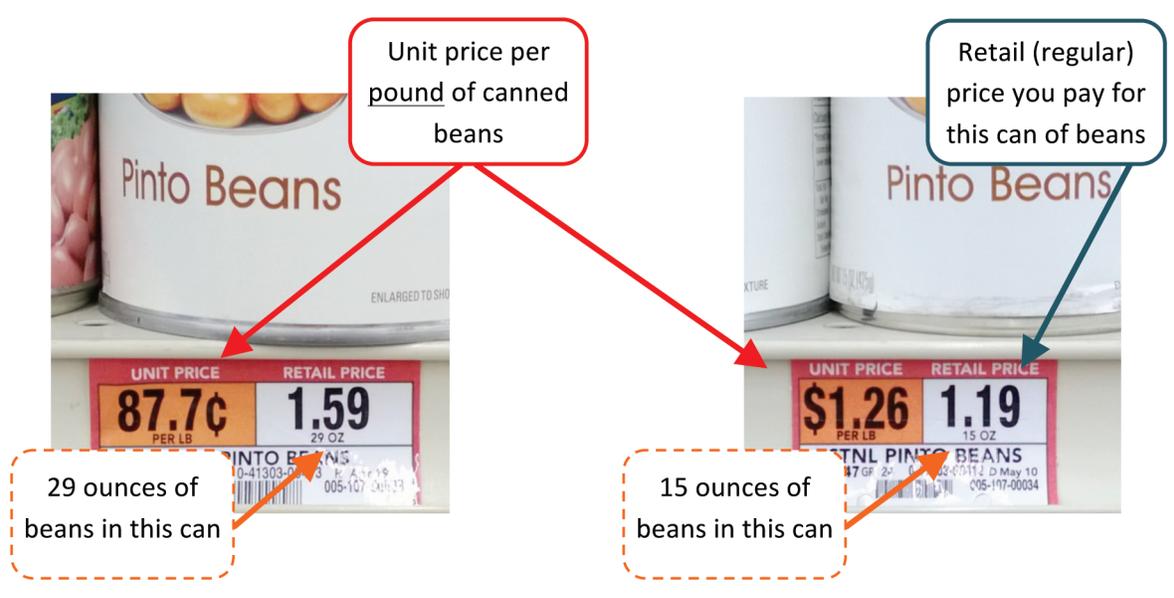
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Do you ever find yourself trying to figure out which brand or size of a product at the grocery store is cheaper to buy? While trying to sort this out, do you feel like you need a calculator? No worries; there is a very easy way to find out. It is called unit pricing.



Unit pricing is the price of a product per standard unit such as pound, ounce, or gallon. It allows you to easily compare the prices of items like foods, beverages, pet foods, and cleaning supplies. The best part is that you don't even have to lift a finger to calculate; the information is already on the price label.

Take a look at the shelf labels of two different sizes of canned beans in the pictures below. The numbers you see on the right side of the shelf labels (white portion) are the regular retail prices; that is what you pay at the cash register. The prices you see on the left side (in orange color) of each shelf label are the unit prices for these two different containers of beans.



Can you tell which one is cheaper? If you were looking only at the retail price, you may think that the 15-ounce can on the right side is cheaper at \$1.19. What if you needed more beans? Would it still be cheaper if you bought two cans of the beans on the right?

As you can see on the unit prices, these beans would cost \$1.26 per pound if you were to buy the smaller can on the right, and it would cost 87.7¢ per pound if you were to buy the larger size can on the left. In this case, you would be saving more money by buying one larger can (29 ounce) of beans (on the left side) instead of two smaller cans.

Although unit pricing is very helpful, not all grocery items or grocery stores are required to have or show the unit prices. The rules about unit pricing vary from state to state. Certain items such as medications, vitamins, ice cream, some frozen foods, and small snacks (usually 5 ounces or less per packet) are exempt from unit pricing requirements in New Jersey. Some small businesses are also exempt from using unit pricing on their shelf labels. You can learn more about the unit pricing regulations at <http://www.nist.gov/pml/wmd/metric/pricing-laws.cfm>.



The next time you find yourself wondering about the price of an item, don't forget to look at the unit price to be able to compare and choose the best option for your budget and family.

25 Steps to Health and Wealth

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There are 25 behavior change strategies in the Small Steps to Health and Wealth™ (SSHW) program. Each of these strategies is described in detail at <http://njaes.rutgers.edu/sshw/>. Pick three or four strategies to put into practice simultaneously to improve your health and finances.

Below is a brief description of each strategy:

1. Track Your Current Behavior-

Record daily food intake, physical activity, income, and expenses to better understand current behavior practices and to use as a benchmark to measure future progress against.



- 2. Unload Your Childhood Baggage-** Identify past negative influences on health and financial behaviors.
- 3. Put Your Mind to It-** Use bold declarative phrases to state personal change goals and visualize future success.
- 4. Commit to Making a Change-** Identify desired changes, action steps to achieve them, and anticipated obstacles and strategies to overcome them.
- 5. Defy Someone or Defy the Odds-** Use a bet with someone or a scary health or financial statistic (e.g., obesity rates, lung cancer deaths, bankruptcy filings) as an incentive to make positive changes.
- 6. Think Balance-Not Sacrifice-** Reframe thoughts about “giving up something” to a mindset that emphasizes balancing income and outgo with respect to eating and spending.
- 7. Control Your Destiny-** Identify perceptions of how personal behavior influences future outcomes and take steps to achieve success that can be attributed to personal efforts.
- 8. Make Progress Every Day-** Use daily affirmations, daily learning activities, and daily action steps to make incremental progress toward health and wealth goals.
- 9. Get Help and Be Accountable-** Identify resources for support toward achieving personal goals including friends, family, professional advisors, an employer, and community programs and organizations.

- 10. Meet Yourself Halfway-** Pick several foods and beverages and eat or drink half the current portion size. Do the same thing for discretionary household expenses and cut them in half.

- 11. Say “No” to Supersizing-** Identify “super-sized” foods eaten (e.g., “value meals”) and items purchased (e.g., buy 3, get one free) and smaller size alternatives that reduce calories (health goal) or cost (wealth goal).



- 12. Convert Consumption Into Labor-** Identify how much physical activity time it takes to “work off” a high calorie food or beverage or how many hours of work are needed to earn money to buy specific items.

13. Compare Yourself with Recommended Benchmarks-

Compare health status with benchmarks for things like BMI, physical activity, and fruit and vegetable consumption and personal finance status with benchmarks such as credit scores, debt-to-income ratios, and emergency fund accumulation.

- 14. Use Easy Frames of Reference-** Use common objects (portion size measurement aids) and dollar amounts, respectively, to understand and personally apply health and financial recommendations.

- 15. Automate Good Habits and Create Templates-** Create automated routines and template forms to improve health and increase wealth such as meal plans, weight loss programs, payroll savings, and direct deposit.

- 16. Live “The Power of Ten”-** Follow recommendations based on the number 10 or multiples thereof such as save 10% of gross income, reduce 100 calories per day, and walk 10,000 steps per day.

- 17. Take Calculated Risks and Conquer Your Fears-** Identify personal fears related to making positive health and financial changes and strategies to overcome those fears.

- 18. Appreciate Teachable Moments and Wake-Up Calls-** Identify situations resulting in a heightened awareness of the need to change health and financial practices and the consequences of not making a change.

- 19. Weigh the Costs and Benefits of Changing-** Identify the costs and benefits of changing behavior and not changing.

- 20. Step Down to Change-** Identify a series of gradual steps to make health and financial changes. An example is shopping for clothing at an expensive department store, a mid-price retailer, a discount store, and a thrift shop.

- 21. Kick It Up a Notch-** Build upon already positive health and financial practices to make them even better.

- 22. Control Your Environment-** Identify ways to enhance positive action by restricting certain practices (e.g., holiday spending) and rearranging one’s surroundings. This strategy is often referred to as “stimulus control.”

- 23. Monitor Your Progress and Reward Success-** Identify progress indicators and rewards for each progress level.

- 24. Expect Obstacles and Prepare for Relapses-** Identify how to handle people or situations that can sabotage success.

- 25. Set a Date and Get Started...Just Do It-** Make a firm commitment to take action with clearly defined goals, a firm start or quit date, planned action steps, and/or a personal Behavior Change Contract.

Families Can Make a Difference in School Wellness

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Parents and families can have a big impact on their children's health and academic success. Parents that eat healthy foods and are physically active are positive role models for their families. Parent participation in school wellness efforts goes one step further in demonstrating that a healthy lifestyle is a priority.

What is school wellness?

School wellness refers to food and nutrition, physical activity, health education, staff wellness, and parent involvement. Food and nutrition policies must comply with federal and state regulations for all foods and beverages sold on the school campus during the school day. These include items for sale in school meals, a la carte cafeteria lines, vending machines and school stores. Additional food policies may regulate classroom celebrations, fundraisers, after school programs, snacks brought from home, PTA meetings, and any other school sponsored events.

Physical activity policies may address time spent and activities required in physical education classes and recess, classroom movement breaks, and activities other than team sports.

School wellness policies are mandated in every school district that participates in federal meal programs. The policies are promoted by school wellness councils whose purpose is to maintain a healthy school environment.

What are School Wellness Councils?

A school wellness council may include school administrators, health and physical education teachers, health services staff such as a nurse or counselor, nutrition and food service staff, maintenance and transportation staff, students, parents, and community representatives.

The council works to develop policies and programs addressing the various components of school wellness. Councils commonly assess the wellness environment in order to identify the school's strengths and weaknesses. The assessment process also helps the council identify priority areas needing improvement for which an action plan can be developed.

The school wellness council is a great way for families to get involved at their child's school. In addition there are many other ways to positively impact your child's health and wellness both at home and at school.



Grow Healthy Team Nutrition* Elementary School Parent Survey Results:

- Approximately 76% of parents feel that school wellness is either important or very important; however only 15% consider themselves involved or very involved.
- 31% of parents are familiar or very familiar with their school's wellness policy.
- 71% of parents feel that family meals are very important yet only 38% of families report eating 7 or more meals together every week.
- 82% of parents report that competing schedules of family members are the greatest barrier to eating meals together as a family.
- 76% of parents frequently or always model healthy eating and 61% frequently or always model being physically active.



How Families Can Get Involved

At Home

- Encourage your child to share what they learned at school with the family.
- Enjoy a healthy meal as a family.
- Try a new fruit, vegetable or whole grain together.
- Encourage physical activity for your child and entire family.
- Have your child help you shop for new foods and prepare a healthy snack.



At School

- Stay up to date with school wellness by reading newsletters, attending parent-teacher conferences, and checking the school website.
- Volunteer by helping with a school garden, physical activity program or health fair.
- Contribute to school health and wellness by joining a parent organization like a PTA/PTO or school wellness council.

*Grow Healthy Team Nutrition is the school wellness initiative of the FCHS Department and the New Jersey Department of Agriculture. Grant funding is provided by the USDA.

Weight Bias: What happens when the overweight child is the target of the bully?

Many students are teased or bullied because of their weight. Often students will exclude overweight and obese children from activities and events. This is known as “weight bias” and studies have found that overweight and obese kids deal with a startling amount of bullying from their peers, teachers, and often their relatives and parents. Even the family isn’t a safe place for some children.



Warning Signs

When children are bullied about their weight they often keep it to themselves rather than talk to their parents, teachers or other trusted adult. Victims of bullying can be afraid to go to school, ride the school bus, use the school bathroom or dress for physical education class. Even more seriously, bullying can lead to low self-esteem, depression, anxiety and suicide.

Parents and Friends Should Look for these Signs and Symptoms of Emotional Distress

- Reduced energy or interests in activities they used to enjoy
- Reluctant to participate in activities or social events
- Increasingly sad, lonely, angry or withdrawn
- Pull away from friends or has few friends
- Changes in sleep and eating patterns
- Self-conscious about appearance and how clothes fit
- Health complaints
- Decreased academic achievement; they are more likely to miss, skip, or drop out of school.

A very small number of bullied children might retaliate through extremely violent measures. In 12 of 15 school shooting cases in the 1990s, the shooters had a history of being bullied.

How Parents Can Help Their Child

- Communicate that you are there to be supportive.
- Listen to your child - it may be difficult for them to open up.
- Encourage them to talk to you, a teacher, guidance counselor or school principal.
- Talk about ways to avoid situations where bullying may occur.
- Emphasize the importance of friends or buddies.
- Foster self-esteem without focusing on weight.
- Model behavior that demonstrates it is not acceptable to treat others unfairly because of their weight.
- Advocate for your child.
- Familiarize yourself with the New Jersey Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act, a policy created in 2011 by the NJ legislature to combat bullying in public schools. It is one of the toughest anti-bullying laws in the country.



What Schools and Parents can do to Reduce Weight-Based Bullying

(From Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity)

- Address the issue of weight based bullying in anti bullying trainings for school personnel.
- Ask Boards of Education to include body weight as an example of bullying in anti bullying policies.
- Treat weight bias as a legitimate form of bias – it is just as serious as other forms of teasing and bullying.
- Be on the lookout for weight bias, and intervene when students are teased about their weight

Families, schools and the community need to increase awareness about weight-bias bullying to help our children. Overweight and obese children suffer great emotional trauma which affects their health and can last a lifetime. Effective interventions are needed to help victims cope.



A Garden-Enhanced School Wellness Initiative

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Recent government data indicate that 31% of New Jersey children ages 10-17 are overweight or obese putting them at risk for chronic disease now and in the future. NJ children are also not meeting the recommended guidelines for vegetable and fruit intake which are part of a healthy eating pattern. Health impacts for overweight children are similar to those seen in adults, with rising rates of chronic diseases such as Type 2 Diabetes and cardiovascular disease. Reasons for these alarming weight trends include poor food choices in school and at home, and lack of physical activity. Attempts have been made to address these issues in the school setting through federal and state regulations which require schools to adopt and implement school wellness policies. One drawback of these mandates is that they do not provide funding to assist schools with implementation of school wellness policies. That's why grants play such an important role.

To address these issues, Family & Community Health Sciences (FCHS) partnered with the NJ Department of Agriculture to secure a United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Team Nutrition grant to provide a unique "garden-enhanced" school wellness initiative called Grow Healthy. Garden-enhanced school wellness programs teach children how to grow their own vegetables and fruits right on school grounds and weave this experience into the nutrition education curriculum. The Grow Healthy project started in 2010-2012 and has received continued USDA funding through 2014.

Recognizing that schools are ideal environments to foster healthy lifelong behaviors, Grow Healthy provided training and assistance for nine NJ pilot schools on ways to promote an increase in vegetable and fruit consumption, provide fun and interactive nutrition education, improve and implement school wellness programs and policies, train school foodservice personnel to provide healthier menu options, and recruit adult volunteers to sustain the program. The overall aim of Grow Healthy is to improve children's health and academic performance by promoting better nutrition and physical activity.

Grow Healthy Outcomes

Foodservice training: Seven regional trainings for school foodservice personnel were implemented and evaluated. Participants completed pre-and post-tests before and immediately following the trainings to assess knowledge gained from each session. Passing grades were obtained by 27% of the participants on pre-tests and 84% on post-tests indicating a significant increase in knowledge.

An online follow-up survey at 1-year post-training sought to assess whether the strategies learned at the training led to actual implementation of foodservice improvements. As a result of knowledge and skills gained at the training respondents reported increasing whole grain choices, decreasing sodium content, and implementing at least one new way to serve a USDA Commodity Food.

Responses from the FTS survey are used by partners such as the NJ Farm to School Network and the NJ Department of Agriculture in furthering NJ's FTS efforts. The complete survey results are available at <http://www.njaes.rutgers.edu/health/farm-to-school-report-083111.pdf>.

Garden-Based Nutrition Education: During the 2011-2012 school years, two school-wide taste tests were conducted at each of the nine pilot schools. Schools selected a variety of locally grown vegetables and fruits for students to taste that complemented the accompanying nutrition lesson and that would help school nutrition personnel provide kid-friendly choices that met current federal school meal regulations. Based on the taste test results, 83% of students were either "willing" or "very willing" to taste the food and 62% were willing to eat the food again.

Of the nine participating schools, five broke ground for a new school garden with funding from this project and four expanded an existing garden. While more training is needed on how to integrate the garden into cross-curricular subject matter, the school garden served as an excellent learning tool about vegetables and fruits and helped promote an increase in the students' consumption of vegetables and fruits.

The **Grow Healthy** project started in nine pilot elementary schools and focused on:

Students

- FCHS created hands-on lessons that highlight NJ crops and include MyPlate nutrition messages. Six or more lessons were taught at each school, some of which were taught by trained parent and community volunteers.
- Students tasted a vegetable and/or fruit after two of the lessons to introduce and promote new foods.
- Each school grew an edible garden with student involvement.

Foodservice Professionals:

- NJ school foodservice directors completed a survey about Farm to School (FTS) practices at their school.
- Statewide trainings were held on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, new school lunch guidelines and more.

Teachers, Staff & Parents

- Schools held school-wide and family events and formed School Wellness Councils to celebrate and promote good nutrition and physical activity.



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A Garden-Enhanced School Wellness Initiative - continued from page 7

A web site was established to support families, school teachers, administrators and school foodservice professionals. The site features project information, fact sheets and links to resources on nutrition, local food systems and school gardens.

School Wellness Programs and Policies: Forty-three trained volunteers known as FCHS Wellness Champions assisted with events, tastings, teaching, and gardening. The FCHS Wellness Champions were parents, grandparents, and community residents.

School Wellness Councils were started or enhanced in eight of nine schools. Council members were trained to complete and implement the results of school wellness environment assessments, including an emphasis on employing strategies to better engage parents and families and in the promotion of role modeling and volunteerism.



Lessons Learned and Future Directions

The 2012-2014 Grow Healthy Team Nutrition Grant project will include further training for school personnel on integrating a school garden into nutrition education and other subject areas. Grow Healthy returned to four of the nine pilot schools and added seven new elementary schools to the initiative. In addition, seven preschool and early childhood education sites joined the project.



For more information, please visit <http://njaes.rutgers.edu/growhealthy/>.