



GET A JUMP ON GOOD

More than 400 area elementary students participate with FOODPLAY at the new Health Education and Wellness Learning Center at Tanner Medical Center/Carrollton. Sponsored in part by Tanner Health Source, the Emmy Award-winning production is designed to educate youth about the importance of making healthy food choices.

HEALTH

Teaching healthy habits early means setting up your children for good health for life

Take the Happy Meal.

It's colorfully packaged, often adorned with cartoon characters and comes with a toy to boot. Since its debut in 1979, the Happy Meal has helped set the standard for marketing to children: Make it bright and cheerful, advertise it during cartoon programs and provide value besides the intended contents (a maze on the back of the packaging, a toy inside or, perhaps the cleverest of all, collect proofs of purchase for a product and mail them in for a prize!).

All manner of foods for children followed merrily along with the way of the Happy Meal. Grocery stores are lined with an abundance of snacks and treats targeted at youth, many of which with one main ingredient: sugar.

There has been a huge rise in childhood obesity in America. Often, because of effective mass marketing tactics, children opt for Fruit Rollups instead of a fresh apple. As a result, the kids who eat sugary snacks aren't burning off those calories because they lead less active lifestyles, choosing to stay indoors to watch television or play video games, ultimately consuming even more sugar.

And so the habits begin to take shape. High-fat, high-calorie diets and sedentary lifestyles are adopted with no concern for possible consequences like obesity, diabetes, heart disease and other unhealthy conditions.

There is not only a rise in childhood obesity but also in instances of chronic diseases, which set in at a much younger age because unhealthy lifestyle choices have been adopted so early.



THE HAPPY MEAL, REFORMED

The Happy Meal—as well as many other meals targeted at children—has come a long way since the hamburger-and-french-fry days. Now, kids can choose side salads, apples, yogurt and even low-fat milk to go with their meals. It's not about avoiding fast food, but making sure you choose the right choices when eating out.

A HEALTH RISK OF EPIDEMIC PROPORTIONS

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 17 percent of children ages 2 to 19 are overweight. That translates into more than 12.5 million children and adolescents facing early occurrences of diabetes, heart disease and other conditions associated with being overweight or obese.

"It's a vicious cycle," says Ed Stevenson, MD, a board-certified pediatrician with Carousel Pediatrics and on staff at Tanner Health System. "Children become overweight, and they find that they tire easily from regular physical activity, so they become more sedentary and continue to gain weight."

The rise in childhood obesity also fuels itself. "Children want to look like and be like their peer group," Dr. Stevenson says. "That's why they want the same shoes everyone else has, or the same backpack or the same lunchbox. And, if all their friends are overweight and make unhealthy food choices, kids see no reason why they shouldn't make the same unhealthy choices."

BREAKING THE HABIT

Maybe it seems too late—the desire for cheeseburgers, french fries and syrupy cola seems too strong to overcome. But all hope is not lost yet.

"It's still much easier to change behaviors in children than it is in adults," says Abigail Kamishlian, MD, a board-certified pediatrician with Carrollton Pediatric Clinic and on staff at Tanner Health System. "Someone who has been consuming fatty, calorie-rich foods for three or four years is going to give it up much more willingly than someone who's been eating like that for 20 years."

All it often takes is a change of course.

Children have to be encouraged to become genuinely interested in their health. It is important to convince them that there's value in being physically active, eating healthy foods and learning to maintain a healthy weight. Building fun into health-oriented activities for kids can be effective also.

TANNER HEALTH SOURCE CAN HELP

To help make healthy eating fun, Tanner Health Source has developed several programs specifically designed for children.

The Tanner Healthy Kidz Club works to first establish and then reinforce the idea that healthy eating can be fun.

GET STARTED!

Tanner Health Source offers pediatric education for obese children and those at risk for type 2 diabetes. Services are offered in Carrollton and Villa Rica with a certified educator and registered dietitian. Our staff involves the whole family to customize plans for behavioral changes and meal planning based on the interest of the child. For more information about pediatric diabetes education, call Tanner Health Source at **770.838.8367**.



"If implemented correctly, you can educate a child about proper nutrition without them being aware that they're learning anything at all," Dr. Kamishlian says. "They think they're just having fun, but they're learning valuable lessons, and that plays out when they have to make a choice between a healthy and an unhealthy option. As a result, they often pick the apple over the fried apple pie."

Through a series of games and displays, Tanner Health Source teaches children about how much sugar is in their favorite foods, which grocery store choices are healthy ones and why, and what the risks to their health are if they become overweight. Tanner Health Source has also begun a

An actor from FOODPLAY performs a demonstration about sugary snacks, including soft drinks





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pilot program at Sand Hill Elementary in Carroll County, introducing about 40 third-, fourth- and fifth-graders to healthy diet concepts.

Tanner Health Source also presented FOODPLAY, an Emmy-winning theatrical presentation featuring juggling, magic and audience participation. About halfway through the performance, after describing the amount of sugar in cola and extolling the benefits of water, one of the performers asked the elementary students in attendance, “Who likes the sweet stuff?”

While the question was meant to introduce the benefits of 100 percent fruit juice, the audience responded with boos, realizing already that water was their best bet for better health.

BUILDING BLOCKS

Tanner Health Source programs are only the beginning.

“It’s important to reinforce these positive behaviors,” Dr. Stevenson says. “Encourage children to make healthier choices and take care

of and respect their bodies. Right now, they’re learning to avoid obesity, but a healthy appreciation for oneself can also help children avoid drugs and other risky behaviors later in life.”

Dr. Kamishlian says it’s also important for parents to be role models.

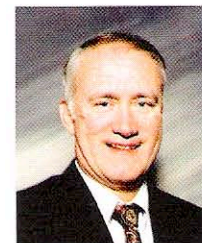
“Children will do as they’re shown,” Dr. Kamishlian says. “If they see their parents making unhealthy choices, they’re going to make unhealthy choices. It’s important that parents practice what they preach.”

If parents themselves are looking to find ways to lead a healthier lifestyle, Tanner Health Source also offers a number of classes and programs to help adults learn about healthy eating, exercise, weight loss and other issues.

“Education is the key to prevention when it comes to obesity and chronic disease,” Dr. Stevenson says. “If you really understand how much fat and calories are hidden in commonly consumed foods, and what the consequences of eating those foods may be, you’re going to be more likely to choose the healthier option.”



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