

INSIDE GRUNDY COUNTY
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This past week we hosted a satellite workshop at the Grundy County Extension office that addressed the issue of childhood obesity and practices that parents and care givers can use to encourage children to eat healthy foods and in proper proportions. I certainly am not an expert on this but as a parent of two young children I am very interested in their health. The workshop was sponsored by Penn State University Extension and many of the tips covered were discussed in the broadcast and provided in the handout Parents Count: Practical Tips for Parents. Childhood obesity has become a huge concern in this country and we must take steps to reduce this problem in order for our youth to become healthy adults.

Children can be fussy eaters. They may not always appreciate the healthy meals and snacks that are prepared for them and at times may prefer to eat junk food. As parents, our job is to provide balanced meals and snacks that include a wide variety of foods. It is suggested that you not ask your child what it is they would like to eat for each meal. This puts you in the position of being a short order cook. I don't know about you, but I know I would not want to make different meals for each member of the family. As parents and caregivers, we must also decide when to serve food. It is best if meals and snacks are served at regular times.

According to Penn State researchers, a good eater is not one who eats everything in front of them but instead is one who eats when they are hungry and who listens when their body tells them what foods they need (of those you serve) and in what portions. Many of us were raised to be members of the "clean plate club" so we ate everything on our plates even when we were no longer hungry. While that may be satisfying to the food preparer, it may not be teaching the best eating habits to children. Kids are not going to let themselves starve; they will eat as they need to.

The other contributing factor to the ever increasing obesity problem in this country is serving size. Serving sizes continue to grow. Children portions are generally larger than what they need. To learn more about serving sizes and what is appropriate for children go to: www.MyPyramid.gov.

In addition to providing healthy meals and snacks it is essential that children engage in age appropriate exercise that helps keep their bodies healthy. You may want to check out the Go the Distance 2007 campaign that is available to help encourage youth to become more physically active.

For more information about healthy eating choices, contact the Grundy Office of ISU Extension at 319-824-6979.