You may find that parents need more information about healthy habits. For example, often parents and children don’t know how much they are eating. Misjudging portions and serving sizes is one of the most common mistakes people make when evaluating their eating habits. Talk to patients and families about how to avoid eating too much.

Try these messages:

• “What size would you say your plates are at home? A full-sized, ‘adult’ dinner plate is about 9 inches across. Adult plates are the right size for adults, but a 7-inch plate is better for young children and pre-teens. If you only have an adult-sized plate, fill it halfway.”

• “A healthy portion serving portion is 1 vegetable (for example, broccoli, carrots, green salad); ½ protein (for example, fish or lean meat); and ¼ starch (for example, brown rice, whole-wheat tortilla, baked yams, or whole-grain pasta).”

• “When you’re eating out, order the smaller size if it’s available or ask for half to be wrapped up to take home.”

• “With each discussion, try to separate the problem from the child—interact in ways that externalize it. ‘What kinds of food do you and your friends/family see as you walk around your neighborhood? Being surrounded by fast food can make it harder to make healthy choices.”

• “Communicate empathy and support. ‘That sounds difficult. Let’s talk about how we could deal with that…Now, do you think you could make that change?”

• “Communicate empathy and support. ‘You love to dance to music…that’s great. Dancing is a great activity to help you stay healthy.”

• “Focus on solutions. ‘Let’s talk about one thing you and your family can do to make healthier choices. How about cutting out the soda’.”

Adapted from:
Assess Weight Status

A child’s weight status cannot be gauged by his or her appearance, but is determined by BMI percentile-for-age. To identify at-risk patients early:
• Assess all children and adolescents for overweight and obesity using BMI percentile-for-age to identify at-risk patients early.
• Calculate BMI using:
  - The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC’s) Pediatric BMI Online Calculator (http://apps.nccd.cdc.gov/dnpabmi/), or
  - Your electronic health records system (if applicable), or
• One of these formulas:
  BMI = Weight (kg) / [Height (m)]^2
  - Overweight: BMI percentile > 85 but <95
  - Obese: BMI percentile > 95
  - Severely obese: BMI percentile > 99

To assess weight status for 2-3 years old:
1. Take accurate height and weight measurements for each child.
2. Plot the BMI on the age-and gender-specific CDC growth charts. If available, use the growth charts for children ages 2-3 years old.
3. Consider BMI percentile-for-age in the context of the child’s history: rapid weight gain or a child whose BMI is rapidly crossing percentiles may indicate the need for a weight management plan.

Ask ALL Patients About Health Behaviors

Evaluate all children and adolescents for risk factors that may lead to development or worsening of overweight, asking detailed questions about their usual dietary habits and physical activity level.

Questions to ask everyone:
• “How many TIMES per DAY do you drink soda, other sweetened beverages, or juice rather than water or low-fat milk?”
• “How many TIMES per WEEK do you watch TV, play video games, or use a computer for non-homework activities?”
• “How many TIMES per WEEK do you eat ‘fast food’ (e.g., McDonald’s, Burger King, Pizza Hut, etc.)?”
• “How many TIMES per WEEK do you drink water, milk, or other low-sugar fluids?”
• “How many TIMES per WEEK do you snack on chips or candy?”
• “How many TIMES per WEEK do you eat fruits and vegetables (excluding French fries)?”
• “How many TIMES per WEEK do you eat ‘value’ meals at a fast-food chain?”

Give Recommendations For Healthy Eating and Physical Activity

Give examples to families of healthy eating and physical activity behaviors. You can suggest they start with “the big 3”:

FOOD::
• “Let’s talk about health choices.”
• “Think about ‘the big 3.’
• “Is it a healthy choice?”

DRINKS::
• “You would be surprised about how many drinks are full of sugar and calories. It’s not just soda but also sweetened teas and sports drinks and even juice. Drink water instead. Nothing quenches thirst better than water, and it’s free.”

PORTIONS::
• “Watch out for large, supersized, or ‘value’ meals. Eating more food than your body needs will make you gain too much weight. You can make healthier choices by choosing smaller portions, splitting your meal with someone else, or taking half of it home for your next meal.”

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY / TV TIME:
• “What do you think might get in the way of making this happen?”
• “Let’s talk about how we could deal with that.”
• “What ideas do you have for making this happen?”

Assess and plan for barriers:
• “What do you think might get in the way of achieving this goal?”
• “Let’s talk about how we could deal with that.”
• “What ideas do you have for making this happen?”

Review:
• “Let’s go over the goals we set today.”

Reasons:
• Once the goals are set, refer to them each time your patient comes to the office. Ask how their patient is doing with the goals. Set new or different goals as needed.

Set Goals With Patients

Children and families need to work together to create healthy eating habits. Collaborate with them to set one or more realistic and achievable goals, so they don’t get discouraged quickly. Assess and help plan for barriers. Then, communicate and review goals.