

## **OVERWEIGHT TEENAGERS – A GROWING PROBLEM**

Obesity in Australian children and teenagers is a growing concern. The most recent figures are staggering and show that approximately 20% of 7-15 year old children are overweight or obese.

Around 10-13 years of age for girls and 12-15 years of age for boys, children go through a teenage growth spurt where they rapidly get taller. During this growth spurt, 'chubby' children may 'grow into their height' and achieve a healthy weight for their age and height. Teenagers who are still overweight after their growth spurt can visit an Accredited Practising Dietitian (APD) for individual advice and support to manage their weight.

Maintaining a healthy body weight is a careful balance between what we eat (the energy in) and how active we are (the energy out). The *type* and *amount* of food we eat are both important things to consider. It is important to choose healthy foods, but to also eat these foods in reasonable amounts. For example, just because a food is labelled 'low fat', it does not mean you can eat twice as much of it! Low fat foods still contain energy and they may sometimes have as much energy as the standard product.

Here are answers to questions commonly asked by teenagers needing to lose weight:

### **What foods should I eat?**

Foods to eat most of are:

- breads and cereals, including high fibre breakfast cereals, rice, pasta and noodles
- all vegetables and legumes (ie kidney and baked beans, lentils, chick peas)
- all fruit, especially fresh fruit and tinned fruit in natural juice.

Other important foods are:

- low fat milk, yoghurt and cheese
- lean meat, chicken, fish, eggs and nuts.

### **Can I skip meals to lose weight?**

No, skipping meals will leave you hungry and may cause you to overeat at the next meal or snack on high calorie foods between meals. Eating regular small meals, including breakfast, will keep your metabolism working well and burning energy!

### **What foods make healthy snacks?**

There are plenty of tasty, quick and healthy snacks. Try;

- raisin toast with a smear of jam
- homemade popcorn (skip the butter)
- banana smoothies (blend banana, low fat milk and yoghurt)
- fresh fruit kebabs
- diet jelly
- rice crackers and ricotta dip

### **What are the best choices for takeaway foods?**

Some takeaway choices can be better than others can. Try:

- a plain hamburger with salad (skip the egg and bacon)
- Japanese sushi and nori rolls
- Grilled fish and baked potato (instead of fried fish and chips)
- vegetarian thin base pizzas
- Asian noodles and stir-fries

**Nadia Mastersson**

**Senior Dietitian, APD  
Dept Nutrition and Food Services  
Women's and Children's Hospital**