

Keep your kids fit, Missouri!

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Preventing Childhood Obesity in Missouri

Childhood obesity is on the rise! What can we do keep kids healthy?

Introduction

Kids and teens often fail to meet recommended dietary guidelines, eating too much fat, sodium, and sugar while consuming inadequate amounts of fiber and some vitamins and minerals. In combination with inadequate physical activity, this type of dietary pattern can result in certain health problems, including obesity. Obesity rates are on the rise in the US, even in kids and teens. From 1963-1970 vs. 1999-2000, the proportion of overweight kids in the US has increased substantially, from 4.2% to 15.3% for 6-11 year olds and from 4.6% to 15.5% for 12-19 year olds (1). Among children young ages 2-5, approximately 20% are overweight or at risk of being overweight; this proportion increases to 30% for kids and teens ages 6-19 years old (2). But lifestyle changes can be challenging, and physical activity in free time is being replaced by video games and computer time. Eating behaviors and activity levels are influenced by a variety of factors, including genetics, biology, values, culture, economics, social and physical environments, and the media. What can be done to address these influences, improve diet and activity patterns among kids and teens, and reduce obesity rates?

Recommendations

- Provide healthier food and beverage options in vending machines and for point of purchase sales in schools, with special attention to fruits and vegetables
- Create a culture that promotes healthy eating and physical activity in schools, and involve students in the process
- Incorporate information on healthy behaviors, including the importance making healthy food choices and being physically active, and on how these choices can be fun for kids and teens, into the school curriculum

The Challenge

Healthy foods face stiff competition from foods that are advertised on TV and placed in vending machines in school. Not only are young people exposed to more advertising and marketing for less healthy foods, but advertising and marketing for healthier options isn't as 'exciting' or 'fun.' In school and sometimes at home, healthy food choices are sparse. And instead of going outside with friends or playing sports, kids are more likely watch TV, play video games, or spend time on the computer. The challenge is to find ways to increase healthier choices, and to make it easier for young people to make these choices.

Media and Commercial Environment: Advertising and marketing via television, internet, product placement

Physical and Social Environment: Availability of and access to foods at school and home, peer influence, school activities, PE

Individual Factors: Demographic, lifestyle, and household characteristics, culture, values, genetic and biological factors, preferences, time

Diet and Physical Activity

Obesity and Health

Recent Research

- The availability of healthy food choices in schools and access to opportunities for being physically active at school have been examined, as have related changes in the school environment over time
- Recent research has focused on the relationship between kids' environment, and specifically on availability of healthier food choices, and their likelihood to make healthy choices

Findings

- Changes in the school environment that support healthy choices increase the chances that children will implement and maintain healthier behaviors (3, 4)
- Long-term changes in health behaviors can be obtained in school settings where the environment supports healthy choices (3, 4)
- Interventions in school settings hold promise for reaching a wide audience of students that may otherwise have limited access to information about healthy behaviors (5)
- Environment plays a role in fruit and vegetable intake, with availability predicting intake in kids (6)

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