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NEWS RELEASE

Childhood Obesity

Obesity among children and adolescents has tripled over the past three decades. For example, among elementary school age children, 21 percent in upstate New York and 24 percent in New York City are obese.

Every parent should be concerned about the increasing risk of obesity in children and youth. Obesity or overweight at a young age can lead to lifelong health problems, including heart disease, diabetes and asthma. The rise in overweight children has led to an increase in type 2 diabetes, formerly known as "adult onset diabetes", in children and youths. In addition, overweight children and teens are more likely to become obese as adults.

Besides health problems, overweight and obesity can lead to poor self-image, insecurity and learning problems in school.

"The epidemic of childhood obesity is a serious health problem, but fortunately we know the leading causes. They are sedentary lifestyles and poor nutrition. Parents have a role helping their children balance the calories they consume with the calories they use through physical activity and normal growth," said the Otsego County Department of Health.

The New York State Department of Health recommends increasing daily consumption of vegetables and fruit, and three or more servings of low-fat milk or other low-fat dairy products or calcium-rich foods every day. Children should get at least 60 minutes of physical activity every day.

It's important for parents to be good role models and to buy healthful food for their children. Crispy vegetables, tasty fruits, and low-fat or fat-free yogurt can make healthful snack alternatives to candy and chips. The next time you reach for milk on the store shelf, choose low-fat or fat-free instead of whole milk.

Parents should focus on good health, not on a certain weight goal. Teach and model healthy and positive attitudes toward food and physical activity without emphasizing body weight.

The Otsego County Department of Health also recommends limiting the time your children watch television, play video games or surf the web to no more than two hours per day. The American Academy of Pediatrics advises against television viewing for children age two or younger.

Instead, encourage your children to find fun activities to do with family members or on their own that involve more activity. Be a good role model by taking a brisk walk in the park with your children or leaving the car in the driveway and walking to the next family activity.

Other ways to encourage healthy lifestyles are:

- Remove sugar-sweetened drinks from your home.
- Offer more whole-grain foods with meals and snacks.
- Reduce the number of meals eaten out at fast-food and other restaurants.
- Sit down together for family meals and have that meal last at least 30 minutes.
- Remove TVs and computers from children's bedrooms.
- Include children in active chores, such as washing the car or walking the dog.

To learn more about childhood obesity and how parents can help encourage physical activity and healthful nutrition, visit the New York State Department of Health web site at www.nyhealth.gov.