

HEALTH

Food diary, exercise can help obese children

Special to Sentinel-Voice
A food diary and exercise may be the best combination for children seeking to lose weight, according to researchers.

More than 20 percent of children ages 6 to 17 are overweight, according to Dr. Pat Vehrs, an adolescent health specialist at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston. Vehrs said today's children and teens

are physically less active than the previous generations.

A food diary includes entries for what, when and why food is eaten, as well as specifics on amounts of food eaten and pertinent nutritional information. It's commonly used in behavior-modification programs for adults and can work for children too, according to Dr. William Klish, head of pediatric nutrition at



HEALTH FOCUS

By James L. Phillips, M.D.
Baylor College of Medicine

Baylor. For most children, a moderate diet and exercise can help control weight. Parents

can also try the following tips:
• Encourage children to eat slowly and eat only when they are hungry. This gives them a

sense of accomplishment and can help build self-esteem.

• Participate in physical activity with your children — walk, bike, swim, play basketball. But whatever exercise you both agree on, make it fun.

• Encourage your children to develop hobbies or to participate in a sport or school function that they enjoy. This helps divert their attention

away from food.

• Limit the amount of television time. Assign household chores and other responsibilities, and encourage children to play outdoors with friends or to use at-home exercise equipment.

• Be an example. Follow a healthy, low-fat lifestyle.

Childhood obesity often leads to adult obesity and other health complications.

COPING

How to use progressive relaxation to eliminate stress

By Dr. Charles Faulkner
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Progressive relaxation is a wonderful way to reduce stress and achieve deep-seated rest. The beauty of this technique is that it does not cost you a cent.

Let's begin.
Sit in a comfortable chair. Or, if you prefer, lie down and follow this procedure:

1. Tighten the muscles in your legs by stretching them out as far as you can by lifting them up into the air or by pressing them into the floor very hard. Stiffen them.

Your objective is to tense and tighten every muscle in your legs from the bottom of your feet to your waist.

Hold this tightness for five seconds. Then, suddenly and quickly release the tightness in your legs.

Make them as limp as you can. Drop them heavily as if they weigh a ton.

You will feel a deep surge of relaxation flow through your legs as stress drains out of them.

2. Next, pull in the stomach muscles and simultaneously tighten and tense the chest muscles.

Hold the tightness for five seconds. Then suddenly and quickly release the tension from these muscles.

Make the muscles as limp as possible. You will feel the stress drain out of them.

3. Now, tense the muscles in your arms and shoulders simultaneously.

You may clench your fists tightly, if you wish. Or, you may grasp the bottom of your

Always imagine the stress leaving your body. The entire procedure from step one to step five should take approximately three to six minutes.

chair with both hands and pull up with all of your strength.

Either of these procedures will increase the tightness in your arms and shoulders. Hold this tension for five seconds, then release the grip suddenly and very quickly.

You will feel an immediate sensation of relaxation as the stress drains out of the muscles.

4. Then, rotate the neck muscles in a circular manner very, very slowly.

Follow these steps as you carry out this procedure: Let your head fall forward as far as you can and press your chin into your chest.

The idea is to tense and tighten the muscles in the back of your neck. Now, slowly rotate your head to your right shoulder as if you are pressing your right ear into your right shoulder.

You are now tightening the muscles on the left side of your neck. Allow your head to go as far back as you can.

Rotate your head to the rear as though you are trying to rest your head on your back. This will tense and tighten the muscles in the front of the neck.

Next, rotate your head to your left shoulder as if trying to press your left ear into your left shoulder. This will tighten

the muscles on the right side of your neck.

The steps above should be done very, very slowly and smoothly in a rotating, circular motion without stopping or jerking.

The entire rotation will take approximately 10-15 seconds. Rotate the head to the right three times in succession.

Then, rotate it to the left for the same repetition.

5. The final step in this relaxation procedure involves reducing the stress in the facial muscles.

Do this by clenching your teeth and tightening the jaw muscles. Squeeze your eyes tightly together.

Wrinkle your forehead and frown the facial muscles as if you are very angry.

Hold this posture for five seconds. Now, release suddenly and quickly.

Make all of the facial muscles as limp as you can.

You will feel a wonderful reduction of stress and deep relaxation in all of the facial muscles.

Always imagine the stress leaving your body. The entire procedure from step one to step five should take approximately three to six minutes.

You may do it as often as you wish.

It is a marvelous way of achieving the relaxation that you need in order to sleep quickly and deeply.

Careful diagnosis essential for attention deficit/hyperactivity

Special to Sentinel-Voice

HOUSTON — Inattentive and hyperactive children do not necessarily have attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. (ADHD).

"Diagnosing ADHD requires testing and careful evaluation of a child's behavior," said Dr. Diane Treadwell-Deering, a child psychiatrist at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston and a specialist at Texas Children's Hospital's Learning Support Center.

ADHD, characterized by short attention span, distraction, impulsiveness, aggressiveness and constant attention-getting behavior, is a biological disorder present at birth. Symptoms, often recognized by day-care or first-grade teachers, must be present by age 7 for classification as ADHD.

"Clinical experience and testing helps us determine whether the symptoms and behaviors are abnormal for a child's age and developmental stage," Treadwell-Deering said.

Diagnosis involves obtaining information about the child's habits and lifestyle from teachers, parents and other adults. Specific tests to determine attention span, impulsivity and how a child approaches academic tasks are given.

Physicians also rule out conditions that can have similar symptoms such as learning disabilities, depression, anxiety, obsessive-compulsive disorder or petit mal seizures.

Once diagnosed, there are several medication choices.

"Stimulants, such as Ritalin, dexadrine, Cylert and Adderall, are most often prescribed for attention span and concentration problems," Treadwell-Deering said. "Medication choices often depend on the child's main symptoms."

Other medications, such as tricyclic antidepressants and clonidine, can be given in combination with stimulants or when stimulants are not effective. Wellbutrin may be prescribed when a child had ADHD and depression.

Treadwell-Deering recommends structuring the environment in a way that helps the child concentrate and pay attention. She suggests the following techniques:

• Getting a child's attention when giving instructions—make eye contact, touch his arm or shoulder.

• Getting clear, explicit and short instructions rather than a long list. Not "go clean your room," but "go put your books on the shelf."

• Making the child repeat instructions.
• Giving a written list or verbal instructions supported by something written—like a chore chart.

• "Most of these techniques work well for all kids and especially well for children with ADHD," she said.

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