

Nurturing your child's relationship with food



Fear is a common reaction to 'the obesity epidemic', so it's no wonder that children today are more focused on food than ever before. Kids are being taught about the importance of choosing from 'good foods', 'bad foods' and 'sometimes foods'. But, is this information making them healthier, or is it further disconnecting them from their innate ability to enjoy food as fuel?

The National Eating Disorder Information Centre (NEDIC) would like parents to understand the real risks of raising children who have an unhealthy preoccupation with food. Look at this reality:

- The rate of obesity in girls is 9 percent, while the rate of eating disorders is double that – at 18 percent;
- The incidence of restrictive eating disorders in children aged five to 12 is twice the incident rate of type II diabetes in all children, from newborn to

18 years;

- 30 percent of girls and 24 percent of boys between 10 and 14 years old have been on a diet, despite being within a healthy weight range;
- Girls and boys who diet are in fact at 324 percent greater risk for obesity than those who do not diet.

NEDIC also points out that healthy children are born with the ability to cry when hungry. They do not overeat or binge on milk in their infancy. Young children ask for food when hungry and will stop eating when they are full. The organization says that parents can help prevent eating disorders by nurturing a healthy, mindful approach to food. Here are some helpful ways to do it:

- Try to eat together at the family dinner table, away from the distraction of electronic devices;
- Acknowledge and express gratitude for the food you are enjoying – discuss the ingredients, like where they come from and how they're prepared;
- Lead by example – enjoy everything in moderation, control portion size, and exercise together;
- Keep healthy snack options readily accessible;
- Get older kids involved in selecting a new recipe and helping to prepare meals in the kitchen;
- Be mindful – eat when hungry, stop when you feel full.

More information is available online at nedic.ca or toll-free at 1-866-NEDIC-20 or 416-340-4156.