

Special Foster Care & Therapeutic Respite Care

Tips, Tools & Resources

More on Healthy Habits

We continue our series on healthy habits with some advice on weight, activity, and sleep.

Health issues:

A sudden gain or loss of weight could signal a health prob.. For example, a weight gain could indicate a thyroid condition, while a loss of weight could signal diabetes. Check with a doctor to determine if your change in weight is the result of a health issue that needs medical attention. Emotional conditions can also contribute to weight gain or loss, as when a person eats to comfort himself or has no appetite as a reaction to turmoil. Many health issues that affect a weight can be treated by behavior changes, medication, physical therapy, or some other treatment. It is always a good idea to talk with a doctor about how you're feeling and any changes that have occurred in your life.

Inactivity:

The previous article suggested incorporating physical activity into your daily life with family fun. In August, Time Magazine cited a study that found children who play and move in regular short bursts, such as running to catch a ball, or running up and down stairs to collect toys, are just as healthy as kids who participate in sports that require vigorous, sustained exercise. The benefits of movement are the same for adults. An individual does not have to participate in extreme activities. Many obesity researchers now believe that very frequent, low-level physical activity throughout the day may be more beneficial than an occasional bout of strenuous activity. The Association of Psychological Science issued a news release in June stating, "physical exercise...

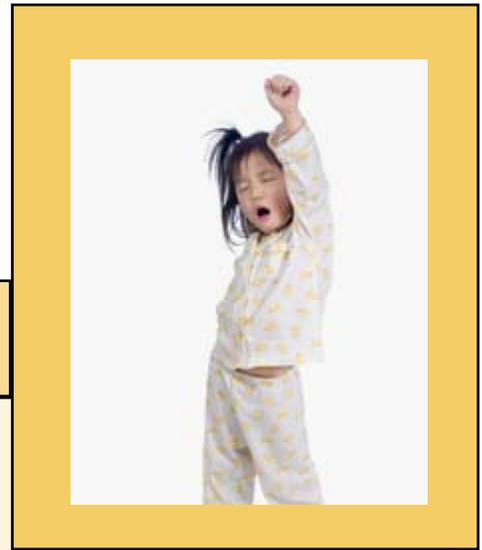
may indeed preserve or enhance various aspects of cognitive functioning." Activity can benefit both body and mind. Activities such as walking, bike riding, miniature golf, bowling and climbing the stairs are actually good ways to achieve those benefits.

Lack of sleep:

Studies link a lack of sleep to a number of health and emotional issues. Sleep deprivation has been associated with diabetes, alcoholism, hyperactivity, lower cognitive performance, anxiety, depression and obesity. Research at the University of Warwick Medical School has found that sleep deprivation is associated with an almost twofold increased risk of obesity for both children and adults. Most adults need seven or eight hours, says Phyllis Zee, M.D., director of the Sleep Disorders Center at Northwestern Memorial Hospital in Chicago. Children from three to five years old should have eleven to thirteen hours of sleep per night, and school-aged children should get ten (to eleven hours per night. A child's physical health, emotional well being, behavior and school performance can all suffer due to lack of sleep.

In many households, electronic distractions interfere with the establishment of a regular bedtime routine that would help a child to settle down and prepare for restful sleep. Calming activities, such as being read to by a parent, have been replaced with electronic stimulation--resulting in less sleep time.

In seeking solutions, remember that healthy habits lead naturally to more healthy habits. Consider that thought in the following:



1. More physical activity tires children and adults, which leads to physical fatigue, which leads to deeper sleep. (Physical activity should not be close to bedtime; earlier in the day is better.)
2. Establish a nightly routine, such as homework, dinner, bath, brush teeth, reading, prayers or quiet time and lights out, to help settle a child or adult to sleep. A consistent, relaxing routine before bed sends a signal to your brain that it is time to wind down, making it easier to fall asleep.
3. Avoid caffeine, alcohol and smoking; they all interfere with a good night's sleep.
4. Eat lightly before sleeping; a full stomach interferes with your body's ability to rest because it's busy digesting your food.
5. Do not nap between the hours of 4 and 7 pm. Although fatigue may encourage a nap, the nap will prevent you from getting good night's sleep. Naps should be taken before 2 pm.
6. Quiet your mind. To help your brain wind down and prepare for sleep, prepare for the next day by writing your to-do list before going to bed. Learn and use relaxation techniques to set the stage for quieting the mind.

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Name: _____

Date: _____

Parent Training Exercise

What are some contributing factors to maintaining a healthy weight?

What information in this issue of Tips, Tools and Resources surprised you?

What are two ways you can help promote a good night's sleep?