

Subject: Preventing Obesity and Encouraging Healthier Living**March 2012**

March is National Nutrition Month, and the most recent national core indicators state that 68 percent of adults with developmental disabilities are overweight or obese. Given that many individuals have limited mobility, healthy living and eating takes on an even more important role in their daily lives.

Being overweight or obese greatly increases a person's risk for many major illnesses and diseases, which can decrease one's quality and longevity of life. It can lead to coronary heart disease, hypertension, type 2 diabetes, cancer, and hypercholesterolemia, as well as many other illnesses.

It is important to be conscious of the need for weight management and healthy living, and to promote a healthy lifestyle, as appropriate, which includes good food choices and activities. A healthy weight range depends on many factors, such as a person's height, weight, and age, among others. It is determined by the balance of energy intake from food and beverages with the expenditure of energy through physical activity and exercise. To ensure optimal health, wellness, and overall quality of life, the following simple steps can be used to guide or assist individuals with developmental disabilities to reach and/or maintain a healthy weight range:

- If you are involved in food preparation, consistently help individuals with a prescribed diet, as ordered by their medical practitioner, to make choices that work for them, and practice proper calorie consumption and appropriate food portions for meals and snacks.
- Ensure that healthy choices are always an option.
- Encourage the consumption of lower fat protein foods such as seafood, lean meat, poultry, and legumes for the weekly menu.
- Encourage the consumption of a minimum of five servings (2 ½ cups) of nutrient rich fruits and vegetables in place of high calorie foods that have fewer nutrients like donuts, cake, cookies, and candy.
- Encourage the substitution of water and sugar free or unsweetened beverages for sugared drinks like soda, fruit punch, energy drinks, and sweetened teas, to reduce calories.
- Encourage the consumption of low fat or fat free dairy products such as yogurt, cheese, or milk.
- Incorporate whole grains into the daily diet to increase fiber, such as whole grain breads and pasta.
- When eating out, encourage the individual to choose restaurants that offer healthy and reduced calorie food choices that are within the parameters of their prescribed diet. Seek guidance from a dietitian for good choices.

For all individuals who live in certified residential facilities:

- Encourage healthy eating and increased physical activity by serving as a role model. Prior to starting any exercise program, it is important to ensure that there are no medical restrictions to the amount or type of activity that is acceptable.
- Encourage the individual to incorporate exercise or physical activity into their daily routine, consistent with any restrictions imposed by a medical practitioner.

If the individual's plan addresses eating in any way, always make sure that any food that is eaten is done so in accordance with their plan (e.g., pureed, ground, etc.).

For more information on healthy diets, please visit www.cnpp.usda.gov/dietaryguidelines.htm. For physical activity guidelines for people with disabilities, visit www.health.gov/paguidelines.