Why Do I Love Ice Cream: How Parents and Families Can Affect Food Preferences and Eating Behavior

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Food Preferences
Importance of Food Preference

• Offering healthy foods not sufficient to improve diet quality, but important
• Food preferences of children most determines intake (they eat what they like)
Learning Food Preferences

• We are born with preference for sweet/salty, rejection of sour/bitter
• Most of us can confirm that these preferences often continue into adulthood (peanut M&M’s anyone?)
• My sister-in-law sprinkles just a dash of salt on her chocolate chip cookies
Learning Food Preferences (continued)

• Breast-fed infants have greater taste variety (ie, garlic) than formula-fed infants

• Breast-feeding may lead to greater acceptance of new foods later in life

• Will lead to more variety in diet

• 5-10 exposures of new food needed to cause acceptance
Food Preferences (continued)

• Modeling of eating behaviors is critical to food preferences
• Models of eating behavior most influential if person viewed as powerful/similar
• Older peers in day care or school, family members, mothers, day care teachers, important models
Food Preferences (continued)

- Encouragement to eat “good” foods increases DISLIKE for that food.
- Withholding “bad” foods as punishment or using as reward increases preference and fosters “good and bad” thinking.
- Variety of foods is encouraged for everyone, including children.
Food Intake Regulation
Food Intake Regulation

- Formula-fed babies grow more rapidly
- May be due to increased parental control of intake with formula feeding
- Who decides when a breast fed baby has eaten enough?
- Breastfeeding recommended by CDC
Food Intake Regulation

- Practices that encourage (cleaning plate) or restrict intake reduce use of internal signals
- USDA started idea of cleaning plate after WWII
- Roy Rogers perpetuated the idea
- Parents encouragement to eat leads to greater time spent eating and more overweight
Food Intake Regulation

• High parental control leads to low self-control by children which leads to obesity

• Parents are likely to control children’s eating behavior if:
  – parents have problems controlling eating
  – child is perceived to be at risk of overweight
  – child shows lack of self-regulation
Food Intake Regulation

- Overweight children eat faster and fail to slow down intake toward the end of a meal.
- “Dieting”, intake restriction, leads to overeating and greater BMI in adolescents at 3-yr follow-up.
Parenting Styles and Overweight

- Four styles of parenting studied
  - Authoritative: Respectful of child’s opinions, but maintains clear boundaries
  - Authoritarian: Strict disciplinarian
  - Permissive: Indulgent, without discipline
  - Neglectful: Emotionally uninvolved and does not set rules

Pediatrics, 2006
Parenting Style and Overweight

- Children (1st grade) of authoritative mothers least likely to be overweight (4%)
- Children of authoritarian mothers most likely to be overweight (17%)
- Children of neglectful and permissive mothers also likely to be overweight (10%)
Portion Size is a Problem

- Portion size may be the single biggest issue to weight gain in US today
- Parents can use authoritative style to control portions with children
- Eating out distorts portion sizes (portion distortion), so eating at home is recommended
- Smaller plates is helpful to portion control
Summary Recommendations

• Breastfeed if appropriate
• Parents most positively effect children’s eating behavior by modeling healthy eating behavior
• Variety in the diet is a good thing
• Be mindful of portion size control
• “Eat a variety of foods in moderation”
• Enjoy eating and let your children enjoy eating