

Dietary and Body Fat

What is the purpose of Pathways?

The primary goal of Pathways is to prevent obesity among Native American children. It is not a weight reduction program.

What causes obesity?

The causes of obesity, or excess body fat, are complex and not clearly understood. However, to gain body fat, people must take in more calories than they use.

How will Pathways prevent obesity?

Pathways will help children increase their physical activity and choose more healthful foods.

Does healthful eating mean eating less fat?

Healthful eating means eating a variety of foods to get the nutrients needed and at the same time the right amount of calories to maintain a healthy weight (see the information on the Everyday Foods List). Pathways focuses on a variety of low fat foods because most children's diets are too high in fat.

Why is eating less fat important in preventing obesity?

Three major nutrients provide energy (calories): fat, protein, and carbohydrates (starch and sugar). Eating more calories than needed from any of these nutrients can cause excess body fat. But, there are three main reasons why Pathways is focusing on reducing dietary fat:

- Dietary fat contains more than twice the calories of an equal amount of protein or carbohydrate. Therefore, reducing the amount of fat we eat is an effective way of reducing calories.
- Our bodies are especially efficient in turning the fats we eat into body fat. Research suggests that we will be leaner if we eat fewer calories as fat, even if the total number of calories is the same.
- The preference for fats is learned. By learning to eat a low fat diet early in life, children can form healthful eating habits that may last a lifetime.

Does this mean that children will be following a strict, low-calories diet?

No. Healthful eating does not mean following a strict, low-calorie diet (especially not for children). Healthful eating is a way of life that everyone can enjoy.

How will Pathways lower the amount of fat children eat?

Pathways will be:

Lowering the amount of fat in school meals through the school lunch and breakfast program.

Teaching children how to choose low fat foods through the Pathways classroom curriculum.

Encouraging children's families to adopt low fat food preparation techniques and eating habits at home.

These Pathways components - school meals, classroom curriculum, and family involvement - plus a physical activity component, are designed to reinforce each other. What children learn in class can be applied and practiced in the school cafeteria and at home.

The Everyday Foods and Sometimes Foods Lists

What is the purpose of the Everyday Foods List?

To help children learn about low-fat foods, Pathways developed the list of “Everyday Foods.” An aim of the Pathways curriculum is to help students recognize, taste, and practice choosing low-fat foods.

What is the purpose of the Sometimes Foods List?

The “Sometimes Foods” list was added to the grade four curriculum to help students recognize that it is best to eat some foods only once in a while, not every day. Sometimes Foods are foods and beverages that have a lot of fat, or beverages that have a lot of added sugar.

How were the foods on the Everyday Foods List chosen?

The Pathways staff looked at the traditional foods eaten by each of the tribes, and the foods eaten today. The foods on the Everyday Foods List are:

- * foods and beverages that have little or no fat.
- * foods that are not fried.
- * foods that have little or no fat added when cooked or served.
- * water, diet pop, and other beverages that have little or no added sugar.

How were the foods on the Sometimes Foods List chosen?

Again, the Pathways staff look at both the traditional foods eaten by the tribes and the foods eaten today. Sometimes Foods are:

- * foods that have a lot of fat in them.
- * foods that are fried.
- * foods that have added fat when cooked and served.
- * pop and other beverages that have a lot of added sugar in them.

If children choose low-fat foods, will they still get all of the nutrients they need?

Yes. By eating less fat children will have room to enjoy a greater variety of healthful foods. Some of the foods lowest in fat -- fruits, vegetables, breads and grains -- are the richest sources of vitamins and minerals. Pathways will use the Everyday Foods List to teach children to eat a variety of low-fat foods.

How will the children learn what a “variety of low fat foods” means?

The Everyday Foods list includes foods from each of the following food groups. Pathways will encourage children to enjoy foods from each of the food groups for “a variety of low fat foods.”

- * breads, rice, pasta, cereals
- * vegetables
- * fruits
- * milk, cheese, yogurt
- * meat, poultry, fish, dried beans

What about milk? Are fat-free (skim) and low-fat (1%) milk as healthful as whole milk?

Yes. An often-held misconception is that fat-free (skim) and low-fat (1%) milk also are lower in other nutrients. The vitamin, mineral, and protein content of fat-free, low-fat and whole milk are the same. Only the fat has been removed.

Will lactose intolerant children be told to drink fat-free and low-fat milk?

Pathways will not encourage any child to eat or drink foods that for medical reasons are not tolerated. For children who can drink milk, Pathways will encourage fat-free or low-fat milk. However, any milk with lactose will not be promoted for children who cannot tolerate it.

Pathways is about choices -- choices among food groups and choices within food groups. A healthful eating pattern includes a variety of low fat foods. The Everyday Foods List helps children reach this goal.

School Meals

The school food service and the Pathways staff will be working together to provide tasty, low-fat school breakfasts and lunches. They will also be adhering to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) regulations for the amounts and types of foods that are served.

The school food service staff will lower the fat in school meals, as they:

- * Drain and rinse cooked ground meat
- * Offer fat-free (skim) and low-fat (1%) milk
- * Purchase low-fat vendor products including entrees/main dish; low or non-fat salad dressings; and
- * Use low-fat cheese
- * Use less or no butter and other fats for the following:
 - prepare, bake and serve breads;
 - prepare sandwiches;
 - prepare rice, noodles, and pasta dishes;
 - bake chicken and turkey;
 - prepare gravy;
 - prepare and serve vegetables; and
 - prepare desserts
- * Remove butter and other fats from the serving line.
- * Offer choices of fruits and vegetables
- * Use appropriate service sizes for all menu items,
- * If seconds are served, offer only fruits, vegetables, and/or breads.

Will the school meals be noticeably different all at once?

Changes will occur gradually, allowing children time to adapt to new foods and tastes.

Sugar and Artificial Sweeteners

Is obesity prevented by reducing sugar?

Research does not show a relationship between sugar consumption and body fat. That is, eating more sugar does not cause obesity, and eating less sugar is not a treatment for obesity. Sugar does provide calories, however, and people gain body fat when they eat more calories than they use.

Do children consume too much sugar?

Many children drink large amounts of highly sugared beverages, such as soda pop and powdered soft drinks. One 12-ounce can of soda pop contains about 9 teaspoons of sugar and about 150 calories. Therefore, children who drink excessive amounts of these beverages can easily consume too many calories.

What does Pathways do about sugar?

The primary message of Pathways is to encourage children to replace highly sugared beverages with calorie-free beverages. The best choice is water. The next best choices are artificially sweetened beverages. Pathways does not, however, encourage children to drink artificially sweetened beverages in place of other types of beverages, such as milk or fruit juices. Nor does Pathways encourage children to increase their overall consumption of artificially sweetened beverages.

Which is better-artificially sweetened beverages, water or fruit juice?

For both children and adults, food choices need to be made in the context of a healthful, well-balanced diet.

If a child is thirsty, the best beverage choice is water.

If a child is both thirsty and hungry, good choices are, for example, fat-free (skim) or low-fat (1%) milk, fruit juices, OR water and an Everyday Food.

If children drink artificially sweetened beverages, can they have other sweet foods more often?

Drinking artificially sweetened beverages instead of highly sugared beverages does not mean that children can “compensate” by having other sweets (and usually higher-fat) foods, such as cakes, cookies or candy, more often. This would defeat the purpose.

Are artificial sweeteners safe for children?

Aspartame and saccharin are two artificial sweeteners currently considered safe and approved for use in more than 90 countries.

How is safety established?

The Food and Drug Administration established an acceptable daily intake (ADI) which is defined as the amount of a food additive that can safely be consumed on a daily basis over a person’s lifetime without any adverse effects. The ADI includes a 100-fold safety factor. Although it is very unlikely that a person would consume this much of the additive on a daily basis, there would still be no harm if they did so.

Do artificial sweeteners affect children’s behavior?

Studies have shown that even at high levels of consumption, artificial sweeteners do not affect children’s behavior.