

Regaining Health - Role Modeling Healthy Habits

The "Quarantine 15" has been yet another horrible reality of the pandemic. Not only were we separated, friend loved ones and friends, but unstructured days, decreased motivation, and increased boredom led to unhealthy habits for families. The result, for many, has been weight gain and reduced fitness levels, which has set the stage for disease and long-term health problems. For children, these habits can carry into adulthood. Therefore, a **healthier** lifestyle should be implemented now, with parents serving as role models. However, to do this, parents must take a delicate approach to not contribute to their child having an unhealthy relationship with food.

For over a year, children have had **disrupted** sleep schedules, minimal physical activity, increased screen time, and poor eating habits. The loss of schedules, in general, has led to weight gain in children. During the summer break, children have had an extended period to fall into the unhealthy habit trap. But now that we are getting back into somewhat of a normal life again, the pandemic's health implications need to be addressed. This can be tricky, however, so that we don't cause more fixation on bad habits. Additionally, we must remember that children have varying growth patterns. Therefore, judgment and the need to "fix" a child's weight should be left alone. Instead, **parents** should role model health habits and are supportive of effort.

Typically, when **children** gain weight that is more than parents feel "normal growth," they often begin restricting food as the first line of defense. However, experiments done by Dr. Leann Birch found that "overly controlling what children eat can cause them to fixate more on the foods." We need to keep **children's** overall health as a priority, including mental health. Putting children on diets can cause more harm than good. Instead of worrying about weight specifically, focus on healthy habits, such as **fun activities** and healthy food choices. As weight drops, physical fitness levels will return to a more normal level. Role modeling by **parents** is one of the easiest ways to help children create life-long healthy habits.

Since we've all spent so much time sedentary over the last year, the **motivation** to start may be difficult. Finding fun physical things for children to be involved in is essential, so they stick with it. The SKILLZ Child **Development** Centers encourage a balance of healthy habits for all areas of a child's development, including **physical**, intellectual, **emotional**, and social, all while having fun. This, coupled with nourishing food, will lead to healthier habits and help children feel better overall. The Parent SKILLZ supplemental information goes a step further by helping parents **connect**, be attuned and patient, and prompt good habits through weekly tips. The parent-child bond strengthens, and then children are more likely to follow the healthy habits of their parents.

As we regain more normalcy in our lives, we must begin returning to healthy habits. Although the implementation of more nutritious food choices and fun activities will give us the right jump-start, we must also remain patient with our children during these adjustments. Encouragement and **positive** feedback for their effort will go a long way rather than **judgment** and criticism. The result will be a healthier relationship with food and excitement about physical activity.