ARE WE GIVING OUR KIDS TOO MANY TREATS?

RECENT research funded by safefood found that over 40% of parents are giving their children treats like crisps, chocolates and sweets at least once a day or more, with the majority of parents (73%) not considering that giving them daily is a treat at all. The research was carried out as part of safefood’s three-year campaign supported by the HSE to tackle the everyday habits which can lead to childhood obesity.

Commenting on the findings, Dr Ciocdha Foley-Nolan, Director, Human Health & Nutrition, safefood, said: “Parents are really finding breaking the ‘treats’ habit difficult. Over-consumption of these treats, and there is major over-consumption, is a serious threat to our children’s future health. Parents were also surprised to learn that crisps and biscuits fall into the treats category as these have been given as daily staples for example, after school or after dinner at home.”

Sarah O’Brien, the HSE’s lead for Healthy Eating and Active Living said: “Treat foods are high in fat, salt and sugar and have little nutritional value. Including them as a regular part of our children’s diet damages their health. Parents can take steps to limit how often and how much of these foods their children consume.”

RECENT RESULTS FROM THE HEALTH BEHAVIOUR IN SCHOOL CHILDREN SURVEYS ARE SHOWING SIMILAR FINDINGS:

- More than one in four children report eating sweets once or more every day.
- More than one in 10 of children report drinking sugar sweetened drinks (like Coca-Cola, 7up, Fanta and others) once or more every day.

While as parents most of us don’t want to ban treats altogether, as we know that would make them more appealing, we do need to be more aware of the long-term damage they can do to our children’s health.

The top three ways parents have used to reduce the amount of treat foods their children eat include:

- Try limiting treats to the weekend only.
- Create a habit of having them occasionally.
- Offer healthy alternatives like popcorn or fruit.

Parents are also encouraged not to buy them - if there are not in the house in the first place, your children won’t constantly ask you for them.

And it’s not just children, adults too need to be aware of what we are consuming daily. The Healthy Ireland survey 2015 revealed that more than 65% of us consume snacks or sugar-sweetened drinks every day.

With a third of parents saying they are concerned their children are eating too many treats, safefood have created a new practical tool, www.safefood.eu, to help parents to break the bad habits of treats and these include practical guides on the calories in popular varieties of children’s sweets, crisps and chocolates; expert videos with advice on how to cut down on treat foods and tips on how to make healthier choices as a family.

TIPS FOR CUTTING DOWN YOUR CHILD’S TREATS:

- Cut down on treat foods, but don’t ban them. Banning them makes them more appealing.
- Shopping is a danger time – just buy treats sometimes and don’t have a supply at home. If they’re not in the house, they can’t be eaten.
- Keep the sweets cupboard or biscuit jar out of sight – and out of mind.
- Tell family and friends you’re making changes so they know about the new routine.
- When you have sugary foods, eat them with a meal. It’s better for their teeth and means they won’t fill up on treats between meals.
- Say the kitchen is closed when mealtimes are over, but allow them access to healthy snacks such as fruit, chopped vegetables and water and then send them off to play.
- In the long run, it’s kinder to say no – don’t be afraid to say it!
- Praise them and offer non-food treats, like a game of football, a trip to the playground or disco-dancing at home.
- Limit the amount of treats by getting into the habit of having them every second day or less.
- Keep treat portions small – choose mini or snack versions.
- Offer healthy alternatives, such as water instead of sugary drinks or juice and fruit instead of sweets or chocolate.

Submitted by the HSE’s Healthy Eating and Active Living programme

FURTHER INFORMATION
For further information and tips, see www.safefood.eu

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