PARENTS URGED TO GIVE CHILD-SIZED PORTIONS

Bigger portions of healthy food also contributing to obesity problems

SAFEFOOD, in partnership with the HSE, has recently ran an awareness campaign recently on child-sized portions. Portion size was identified as a key issue in preventing children becoming overweight and we are urging parents to give children child-sized portions. The message is clear that how much children eat as well as what they eat is very important. Recent studies have found that children aged over two ate up to 40pc more food when bigger portion sizes were made available to them.

Dr Ciadhna Foley-Nolan, Director, Human Health and Nutrition, safefood said: “It’s well established that for adults, we eat more food and consume more calories when we’re given bigger portions and we now recognise that this goes for children as well.

“There has also been a significant increase in food portion sizes over the past 20 years, this all contributes to more of our children nowadays carrying excess weight.

“What’s also interesting is that young children up to the age of two have good appetite control and only eat what they need, but older children lose this ability to know when they’re full.”

Research has shown that food portion sizes have significantly increased over the past 20 years, particularly among baked foods like scones, croissants and danishes as well as takeaway foods; some takeaway food portion sizes are now 180pc bigger compared to the late 1980s.

Margaret O’Neill, HSE’s National Dietetic Advisor said, “As a parent myself and a dietitian, I know how important food is for growth and development in children. However, it is the quality of the food we provide our children that is key. Infants and children are not small adults and they need different nutrients than we do as they are growing.

“We need to look at the amounts we are serving children and give them appropriate portion sizes of nutritious food for their age. A teenage boy requires very different portion sizes to a five-year-old.

“The food pyramid is a useful guide for children aged five years and upwards. The HSE and safefood have published a very useful guide for health professionals to assist parents and guardians in communicating with their children about body weight.”

See www.healthpromotion.ie/

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

TIPS ON REDUCING PORTION SIZES FOR KIDS

- Kids need child-sized portions, not adult ones. So give them small portions of food on their plates to start with. If they want more, then give it to them.
- If they say they’re hungry after a meal, offer them something nutritious like fruit.
- Try to avoid having fatty and sugary snack foods freely available between and after meals.
- For smaller kids, use plates and cutlery that match their size, not yours.
- Don’t pressure children to eat all the food on their plate and allow them to stop when they say “I’ve had enough”.
- Remember the proportions of food you offer during the day. They should be roughly one-third fruit and veg, one-third starchy foods like bread and potatoes, one-third dairy like milk, cheese and yogurt and one-third protein like meat and fish.
- Keep treats at a realistic level – a little and not every day.