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## DOH-WALTON OBSERVES SEPTEMBER AS NATIONAL CHILDHOOD OBESITY AWARENESS MONTH



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**DeFuniak Springs, Fla.** – The Florida Department of Health in Walton County (DOH-Walton) is observing September as National Childhood Obesity Awareness Month. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) about 1 in 5 American children has obesity. Compared to children at a healthy weight, children who are overweight or obese are at a higher risk for asthma, sleep apnea, bone and joint problems, type 2 diabetes, and heart disease. They are also more likely to experience bullying, social isolation, depression, and lower self-esteem. For more information from the CDC go to <https://www.cdc.gov/obesity/childhood/index.html>.

“Walton County is fortunate to have many partners who work together to help support the health of our youth,” said Holly B. Holt, DOH-Walton Administrator and Health Officer. “Partners are addressing some of the community factors that affect a child’s ability to maintain a healthy weight, including childcare and school environments, neighborhood design, access to healthy, affordable foods and beverages, and access to safe and convenient places for physical activity. All of these factors affect our ability to make healthy choices.”

There are many ways parents and caregivers can help children reach a healthy weight:

- Having a healthy diet helps children get the nutrients needed for healthy growth and development. A healthy diet is rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins, and low-fat or fat-free dairy.
- Physically active youth have stronger muscles, better cardiovascular health, lower body fat, and stronger bones. Regular physical activity in childhood also reduces the risk of depression. Children need at least 60 minutes of physical activity each day.
- Most of us eat and drink too many added sugars, which leads to problems such as weight gain, type 2 diabetes, and heart disease. Children under the age of 2 should have no added sugar in their diet, and children over the age of 2 should keep sugar intake to less than 10% of their daily calories. Help kids rethink their drink by offering water, plain low-fat milk, or 100% juice instead of soda, flavored milks, and fruit-flavored drinks that are often full of sugar.
- Did you know adults and children spend over 7 hours a day being sedentary? That doesn’t include sleeping either! Many of these hours are spent on a phone, tablet, computer, watching TV, or playing video games. Too much screen time can lead to poor sleeping habits, weight gain, lower academic scores in school, and poor mental health. Reducing

screen time frees up time for other family activities and is a great opportunity to increase physical activity.

- Poor sleeping habits can lead to type 2 diabetes, obesity, injuries, poor mental health and problems with attention and behavior. Did you know children age 6-12 need between 9-12 hours of uninterrupted sleep each night? While youth age 13-18 need 8-10 hours of sleep. Your children can sleep better when they're more active during the day, have no screens in their bedrooms, and follow a consistent sleep schedule – even on the weekends!

Remember, children imitate the adults in their lives. You can be a good role model by adopting these healthy habits for yourself. When they see you making healthier choices they will, too.

DOH-Walton offers a variety of health and wellness educational classes to children in our community, starting with children ages 2 to 5 in early childhood education (ECE) centers, K-12 classrooms, homeschool settings, libraries, clubs, and after-school programs. If you are interested in learning more about our available programs please reach out to Jennifer Jordan, Senior Community Health Nurse, at (850) 401-6283 or at [Jennifer.Jordan@flhealth.gov](mailto:Jennifer.Jordan@flhealth.gov).

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