BMI is used as a screening tool to assess for potential concerns with a child’s weight. BMI is calculated based upon a child’s weight and height and expressed as a percentage compared to other children of the same age and sex. If a child has a BMI-for-age above the 95th percentile on the growth chart, concern is raised that the child may have excess body fat. Excess body weight can contribute to the development of type 2 diabetes, asthma, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and other chronic diseases in adulthood. In addition, overweight children are more likely to become overweight as adults.

Since children are still growing, it is generally not recommended to place a child on a diet. Instead the goal is to focus on developing healthy eating habits, increasing physical activity, and maintaining weight while the child continues to grow in height.

**Healthy Lifestyle Habits:**

- **Focus on Health**
  - Center your child’s diet around a variety of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat dairy products. Save fast food, chips, cookies, cakes, and other sweets for special occasions, not part of the daily menu.
  - At home serve whole wheat bread and pasta, cereals without added sugar, and try to include a vegetable option with meals.
  - Healthy snack options include fruit, low-fat yogurt, string cheese, graham crackers, granola bars, and whole grain crackers.

- **Portion Control**
  - Portion sizes have gotten out of control for individuals of all ages. Children do not need adult-sized portions at meals, nor should they be supersizing their meals at restaurants. Instead serve your child smaller servings at meals and allow your child to request more if still hungry.
  - Serve your child off of child-sized plates and use child-sized drinking glasses.
  - Encouraging your child to try new foods is great, but do not force your child to clean the plate. In the long run, this can teach a child to stop listening to internal cues of fullness.
  - For guidance on daily food plans for children, visit [ChooseMyPlate.gov](http://www.choosemyplate.gov)

- **Sugar-Sweetened Beverages**
  - Reduce the number of drinks high in sugar your child is drinking. Drinks such as soda, sweet tea, Kool-Aid®, lemonade, and fruit punch contain a lot of sugar and provide little to none of the nutrients your child needs to grow. Drinks high in sugar also contribute to cavities.
  - Fruit juice: Choose 100% fruit juice and limit to 6 ounces per day.
  - Instead of sugary drinks encourage your child to drink water and 1% or fat free milk.

- **Schedule Your Day**
  - Children have small stomachs and cannot eat as much at meal time as adults. Instead plan on serving your child 3 meals and 2 snacks per day so that your child is eating every 2-3 hours. This will help prevent your child from becoming overly hungry and eating too much at meal time. Set snack times will also prevent your child from grazing on food all day long.

- **Physical Activity**
  - Encourage your child to participate in a minimum of 60 minutes of physical activity every day.
  - Find activities your family can do together, such as walking the dog, playing catch in the backyard, or going for a bike ride.

- **Limit Screen Time**
  - “Screen time” is any time a child spends sitting in front of a screen. This includes time spent watching TV, playing video games, and playing on the computer, tablets, or smart phones. Total screen time for children should be limited to no more than 2 hours per day. Spend the time normally spent watching TV doing something physically active.
  - In addition, make sure to turn off the TV during dinner and discourage your child from eating while watching TV or playing video games. Being distracted while eating can lead to mindless munching and result in overeating.

- **Food for Nourishment**
  - Do not use food as a reward. As tempting as it might be, do not use ice cream, candy, or other treats as a reward for eating vegetables, fruits, or other foods your child does not want. This reinforces to the child that these foods are less desirable.
  - Do not ban your child from eating treats or other favorite foods. All foods can fit into a healthy diet, the key is moderation! Limit portion sizes of less-healthy foods and offer them on occasion, not every day.

- **Be a Role Model**
  - Eat the same healthy foods you offer your children at meal times and be active together as a family.
  - Do not place excess focus on body weight, but instead keep your focus on your child’s health and happiness.
  - Creating healthy lifestyle habits for the family will have long-lasting benefits for all.

**REFERENCES:**

- [http://www.cdc.gov/healthyweight/assessing/bmi/childrens_bmi/about_childrens_bmi.html](http://www.cdc.gov/healthyweight/assessing/bmi/childrens_bmi/about_childrens_bmi.html)
- [https://www.healthiergeneration.org/about_childhood_obesity/get_informed/](https://www.healthiergeneration.org/about_childhood_obesity/get_informed/)