

Stay Positive

Helping kids stay body positive and healthy

BY CHRISTINA CUSH

PARENTS DO THE BEST THEY CAN WHEN DEALING WITH SENSITIVE ISSUES. But everchanging information makes it hard to nail down the right things to say and do, especially when it comes to body image, weight and eating habits.

Plus, beyond navigating their children's habits, many parents are battling their own ideas, having been bombarded by messages from the \$72 billion diet industry for decades. "The internal loops of parents' self-judgment aren't just going to go away overnight, they will take time and patience

to conquer. In the meantime, no matter what parents are dealing with and where their children stand on the BMI scale, there are resources to keep families happy and healthy, such as local child wellness experts Elizabeth Winings, DNP, PMHNP a nurse practitioner at The Retreat at Ponte Vedra Beach and registered dietician Sam Previte from Dieticians of Palm Valley. A piece of advice both experts will give: the "D" word should get zapped from your family vocab. Here's some more advice, courtesy of the local experts:

Talk it out.

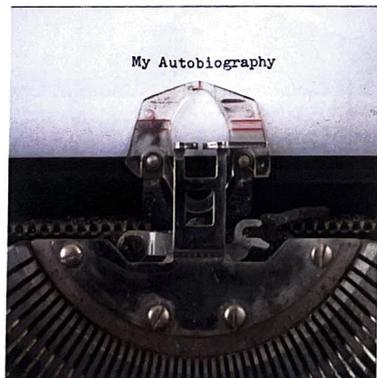
Previte says our society is unfair and cruel to people living in larger bodies, and that bigger doesn't always mean unhealthy. If your kid is on the heavier side, become a safe space for them to talk to you about judgements others make about them. Stay positive and don't say things about weight gain or loss, instead discussing physical attributes, like strength and internal aspects you see in them, like bravery and kindness. Of course, if you are deeply overwhelmed by your child's declining self-confidence, food habits and health, consult your pediatrician.

Introduce the wide world of food.

"It's not kids' responsibility to manage the food they eat," says Winings. Therefore, parents have the joy of offering a range of whole foods (fresh fruits and veggies and food that has been minimally processed and has no additives or artificial ingredients). Veggies, in particular, can taste bitter at first, Winings notes, so they may take a few times and different presentation methods to get thumbs up from your kiddos. Watch your language when offering food, too. Steer clear of judgmental-sounding phrases, such as, "Don't eat more of that," and "You should eat more of this," to more curious language, such as, "Would you like to have more of this?"

Shop and plate with purpose.

Take children to the grocery store and get them involved in the process. "Try to remember that



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your choices are neutral and not good or bad," says Previte. To keep it simple, Previte suggests building meals with this formula: a protein, a carb, and some form of color (from veggies or fruits). The next level of meal-building is considering flavor, fat, and fiber, says Previte.

Plan your dinners ahead-ish.

Not everyone has a lifestyle that enables them to scratch-cook each night. Winings' hack for batch cooking: make a bunch of rice or whole grain pasta in advance to mix with beans and veggies throughout the week. Winings loves Trader Joe's frozen whole grain rice, which is microwaveable and ready in minutes.



Try to remember that your choices are neutral and not good or bad.

—Sam Previte, dietician

Snack with tact.

When kids get older and are grabbing their own snacks, Winings says to make whole foods readily available, as they'll keep them full and fuel their bodies. "Kids won't overeat on fruits and veggies, so whatever kinds your kids prefer, have available at home in abundance and in easy-to-grab ways." Winings' fave snack suggestions are: peanut butter on whole grain toast, celery or apple; popcorn; soup; granola bars with less than five ingredients, like Lara Bars and Kind Bars plus a fruit.

Guzzle the water.

Kids and adults often confuse thirst for hunger, says Previte. If your child says they are hungry shortly after eating a full meal, maybe they are dehydrated, so encourage them to drink some water, she adds.

Move it move it.

Refrain from calling a chilled-out sofa surfer lazy and nudge him or her to shoot hoops or take a bike ride, says Previte, who is also a certified personal trainer. If you talk about activity in a curious way, such as, "How do you feel after you play outside?" or "What do you like about it?", Winings says this neutral position will result in behaviors that are more consistently active and healthy. Better yet, get moving with your kids. If you have to be the crazy backup dancer in your child's Tik Tok video that takes 45 minutes to get right, then take one for the team. *



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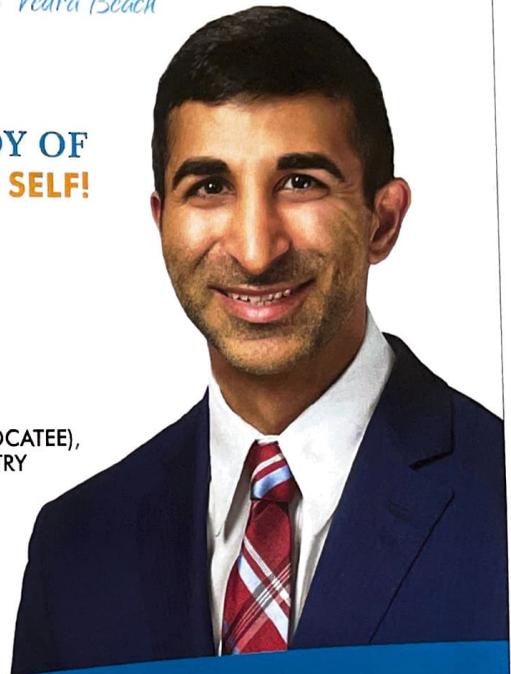
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