

# Benefits of healthy eating in early childhood



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## Introduction

In this assignment I will be focusing on the benefits of leading a healthy lifestyle, diseases and prevention of diseases. I will discuss the chronic diseases that can be prevented and the ways that help to reduce the risks of developing these, and look at major food groups and how these can impact a healthy active lifestyle. I will explore activities for a healthy lifestyle and how they contribute to a reduced risk of obesity and illness. I will also define the meaning of wellbeing and how this can be achieved for children and their families.

## Leading a healthy lifestyle

Leading a healthy lifestyle is paramount in everyone's lifetime as there are many ways in which a child and their family can prevent diseases or a chronic illness, and mental health related problems. The British Heart Foundation have carried out research into living healthily and staying healthy, and discussed that 'eating healthily can stop you gaining weight, which in return reduces the risk of illness' (<http://osclinks.com/59>).

Chronic illnesses concerning obesity are linked with poor diet and not much exercise. The major types of chronic illness are:-

- Coronary heart disease- This occurs when the blood supply is blocked by fatty deposits due to a high diet of saturated fats.
- Cancer- Eating a poor diet which could lead to obesity has several risks. The research that has been undertaken so far in the United

Kingdom suggests that newly diagnosed cancers could have been halved if a person was to lead a healthy lifestyle.

- Stroke- This is where there is a restriction of oxygen to the brain. Eating healthily and undertaking plenty of exercise daily can reduce the risks of a stroke.
- Diabetes- This is a chronic health condition in the United Kingdom affecting around 2.8 million people. Diabetes can be controlled by the use of insulin, eating sensibly and exercise depending on the type. Complications and problems can occur if diabetes is not controlled properly, such as heart disease, kidney disease, high blood pressure, eye problems, and nerve pain and foot ulcers.
- High blood pressure- This could lead to a stroke or coronary heart disease, which could be due to lack of exercise or being overweight.

The above chronic illnesses may be prevented by having a good healthy diet on a day to day basis and exercise. Being healthy would reduce the risk of being or becoming obese which would therefore prevent these diseases occurring.

Cases in the past where children have been mistreated showed that children require a balanced nutrition diet. The Victoria Climbié case in February 2000 highlighted the importance of young people's services working together to reduce the risks of ill care towards children. ' This case highlighted the importance of multi-agency working and information sharing in order to protect children and prevent them from harm'. (www. safenetwork. org. uk). The Children Act 2004 was introduced and the green paper within Every Child Matters which identified five outcomes that are important to children

and young people. These are to be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution and achieve an economic well-being (www.everychildmatters.org.uk). These outcomes have meant that organisations are now working together and sharing information to protect children and young people. This case highlighted the importance of providing children with nutrition.

### Eating healthily

Eating healthy has many benefits which include the prevention of chronic illnesses and mental wellbeing, which in turn could lead to behavioural problems. Children who sit around the table during family time with their families are less likely to become 'choosy eaters'. Eating as a family also promotes family bonding time and encourages children to try different varieties of nutritious foods. Behavioural problems could stem from missing essential minerals and vitamins in a child's diet. A healthy diet should include different nutritionally balanced meals. The main types of nutrition groups are:-

- Carbohydrates which provide a high energy level amongst essential B vitamins such as iron, fibre and calcium. These will be found in foods such as potatoes, bread, pasta, rice and starchy foods.
- Protein is essential in a child's development as it supports body cells, repair and body growth. Proteins contain vitamins and acids which help to keep the bodies cholesterol levels low. Proteins are found in foods such as meat, eggs, fish, bread, milk, and a range of dairy products.

- Unsaturated fats can be beneficial for the body lowering its own cholesterol in the blood. Not all fats are harmful to the body, however saturated fats can increase the body's cholesterol. Unsaturated fats can be found in olive oil, sunflower oil, tuna, salmon and nuts.
- Fruit and vegetables are recommended by Government guidelines for an individual to consume five portions of fruit and vegetables per day. However, new research has highlighted the need for seven pieces per day. Fruit and vegetables contain essential minerals and vitamins to help prevent diseases such as heart, stroke and cancers, while helping to maintain a balanced weight.
- Sugars are within food such as fruit and milk, but there is a high concern for other sugary foods such as fizzy drinks and sweets where sugar is added to these.

All of the above foods are advised to be eaten in portion sizes, including several of the different major foods daily. Nutrients are present within foods such as fibre and potassium, which help to maintain a healthy body. It is important to get the correct balance of the above foods in order to get the maximum benefits of being healthy. Fruit and vegetables should be the biggest portion of food consumed, with protein and carbohydrates in the remaining part of the diet. Sugars and fatty foods should be limited within the diet. When planning meals, seasonal changes may be taken into consideration as individuals consume different foods according to the time of year. For example, salads in the summer and vegetables in the winter.

#### Activities for young children

Activities and exercise are essential for a child as they grow up into adolescence. Setting good habits and providing a good exercise pattern will keep the body from accumulating unwanted fats, which could lead to chronic illness and a high body mass index.

' The Department of Health suggested that the number of 2-15 year olds taking part in the recommended amount of exercise is only 30%' (OSC P10). This is concerning, however opportunities can be made available for children in the house that individuals would not normally think were classed as exercise such as housework and gardening. Activities do not necessarily have to include attending the gym or running a marathon, it can be as little as one hour a day as stated by professors in Glasgow. ' In 2006, professors identified through a study of 545 nursery school children, that one hour of exercise a day was required for children to maintain a healthy body mass index, in addition to eating a healthy diet' (OSC P15).

Activities which can be carried out with young children can focus on physical and mental wellbeing such as walking or taking trips to the local park exploring the environments and growing independent with new surroundings. Children's play centres give children a chance to meet other children and gain confidence playing with others. Creative activities such as cooking encourage parents and children to taste new healthy foods and explore the variation of colours and textures. This would promote a kinaesthetically approach of learning for the child. Other physical activities for young children could include children acting out words in books, using bodies to make shapes and letters. Nature walks and other outings to explore the environment could also be part of physical development. For <https://assignbuster.com/benefits-of-healthy-eating-in-early-childhood/>

babies, reaching and rolling are important to explore the world around them. Toddlers go from crawling, to standing, then walking. Pre-schoolers balance along obstacles, move to music and role play.

Activities for young children can contribute to a healthy lifestyle as they can provide many benefits which include promoting healthy growth and development, and helping to achieve and maintain a healthy weight. Benefits could also include, improving balance, co-ordination and strength while improving posture. Activities would assist with the development of gross and fine motor skills and improve things such as concentration, confidence and self-esteem. Activities provide opportunities to develop social skills and make friends and establish connections between different parts of the brain ([www. healthykids. nsw. gov. au](http://www.healthykids.nsw.gov.au)).

These benefits show that physical development is important for children, and adults need to support this by role-modelling and encouraging throughout childhood to promote a healthy lifestyle.

### Wellbeing

Wellbeing is defined as ' the state of being comfortable, healthy or happy, with security and safety. When looking at a child's wellbeing there are many factors to focus on to give a healthy wellbeing for both the family and the child. The key aspects are like a stone in a bridge where there is a supportive structure which keeps everything upright.

A loving environment would give a child and family the safe factor in life, and would bring a secure feeling to an individual. An example of this is where a

child is comforted, and provided with love and reassurance. By ensuring routines are in place within the family, this would give everyone involved a sense of stability. A bedtime routine would show the child that there is a time to settle down after playing during the day, and consistency with times would allow the child to set healthy balances of time. A positive supportive attitude would create and improve self-esteem, which is essential for a child as they are growing up into society. An example of this could be when letting a child play and share toys with other children, reassuring the child to share when they are reluctant. Creating a positive atmosphere where a child and their family can thrive and always try to look forward in life is important. This could include taking more time to think about a situation and how the child can adapt to this, while showing consistency.

Wellbeing in a child is about the child developing to ensure the child feels valued, supported and confident in their choices. This will enable children to feel positive about themselves and have a positive outlook on life. Choice and opportunities would support children with independence by giving them the opportunity to take the lead role. Wellbeing can be achieved for children and families together through strong attachments.

### Conclusion

From this assignment it can be seen that a healthy lifestyle is of importance to young children and families. There are many benefits that are highlighted in leading a healthy lifestyle, and I have discussed how problems can be caused by not leading a healthy lifestyle. Early intervention looking at diet



and activities, benefit young children as they grow up to learn how important being healthy is, and adults play a supportive role within this.

(1797 words)

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