



School Counsellor Newsletter

Edition 43

Promoting positive body image in boys: Let's talk about food

This newsletter is the second in a series inviting parents to learn about how behaviour and language can contribute to body image, shape and weight concerns – along with unhealthy eating – among boys. This newsletter focuses on key messages about food. It is based on the excellent advice provided by The Psychology Hub's registered nurse and therapist, Anna Comins, and senior clinical psychologist, Jo Vallance, in the livestream they delivered to the Medbury and Christ's College parent community on 7 September.

The most important message from Jo and Anna is that **all food has nutritional value**. Rather than having food rules, forbidding certain foods or following particular diets, the **focus needs to be on having a balanced diet and fuelling the body**. Some key points to note:

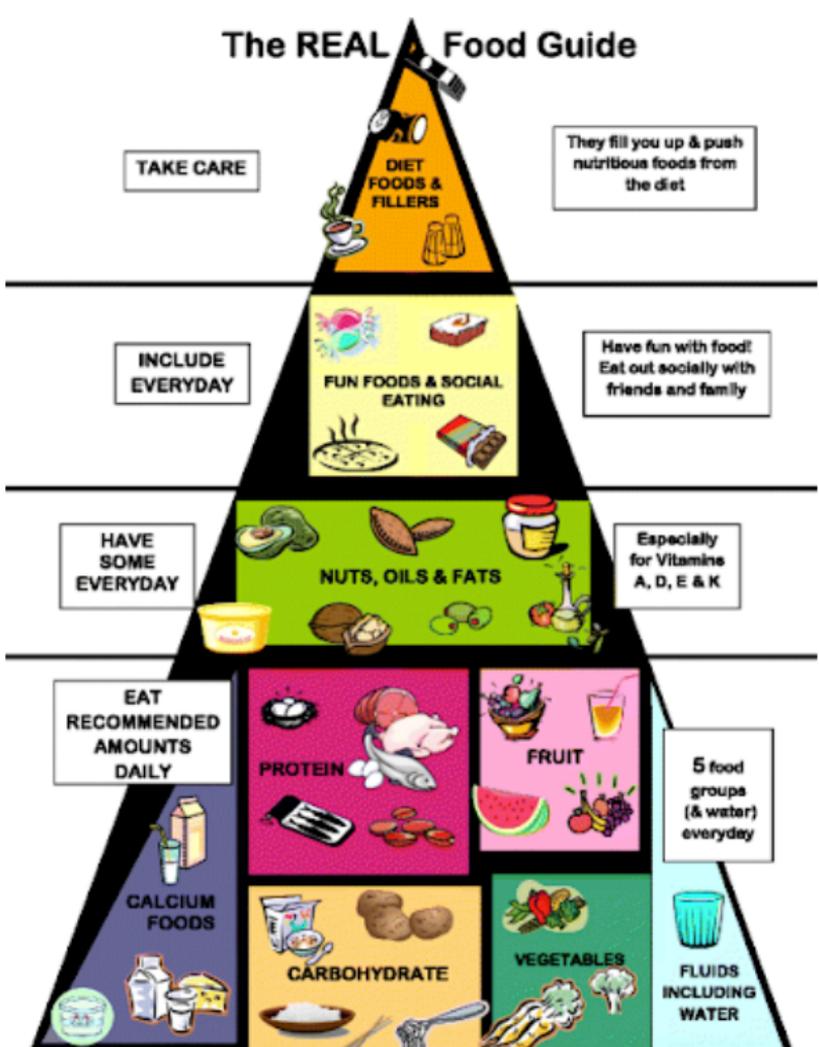
- Using the term 'fun foods' is better than 'bad foods'. If you use the term 'bad foods' then your son may develop a feeling of guilt when eating those foods. If a food is considered bad, or forbidden, then your son may simply want to eat it more.
- Fun foods have a place in the diet of adolescents. It is very normal for young boys to want to eat lollies, baking, chips and fast foods, and such foods are often an important part of socialising. It is important to allow fun foods but to also have conversations with your son about food. For example, talk about the fact that fun foods provide nutritional value but this is low compared to the high nutritional value of foods such as carbohydrates, proteins and fruits and vegetables, which should therefore be eaten more frequently.

- A suggested resource you may like to look at further is The Real Food Guide, an image of which has been included at the bottom of this newsletter.

It is also important to think about food in relation to puberty. Your son is going to need to eat more and is likely to gain weight as he goes through puberty. It takes a lot of energy to change and grow so it is important to be aware of this and be calm and supportive of this as a parent. Expect your son to be very hungry as he goes through this period of development and avoid any urge you may have to restrict his diet at this time. As a general rule of thumb, boys should be having six meals/snacks a day, eating at least once every 3-4 hours.

Signs and behaviours of concern to watch out for in your son include:

- Your son restricting his food intake, talking about his calorie intake or avoiding certain foods. This could be due to peer pressure or social media influence (which will be talked about in a later newsletter). If an adolescent boy is underweight and not eating well it can affect his mood, energy, mental wellbeing and ability to develop in puberty.
- For older boys, probably beyond primary school age, take note if your son is following an extreme diet or using sports supplements. Such actions are not recommended for under 18 year olds as these products or diets are often not tested and can contain substances, such as caffeine, which can stunt growth at this age and significantly impact mood. It is important to monitor what your son is eating, even when they are older, and to seek guidance from a dietician if need be.





Jenelle Hooson

Jenelle is a Registered Provisional Member with NZAC (New Zealand Association of Counsellors).

If you wish to discuss the services the School Counsellor can provide, please see your son's homeroom teacher or Amos Pilgrim:

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