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CONTACT: Dr. J. Kip Matthews
Licensed Psychologist
(706) 613-5290
drkip@akcconline.com

Amy Han Dietrich
Director of Communications and CE
(404) 634-6272, ext. 208
amydietrich@gapsychology.org

Psychologists Offer Tips to Improve Children's Eating Habits

Atlanta, GA, March 3, 2015 – Parents play an important role as guide and coach for children as they make choices about eating. This March, recognize National Nutrition Month by taking steps to improve eating habits for the whole family.

Research shows that children who eat a well-balanced diet and exercise regularly are likely to perform better in school, feel better about themselves, cope with stress effectively and better regulate their emotions. They also have higher self-esteem and are less prone to developing anxiety and depression. Additionally, establishing healthy eating habits early in life can lead to long term healthy behaviors in adulthood.

According to a report from the Center for Disease Control Division of Nutrition and Physical, and Obesity, 14.8% of adolescents in Georgia are overweight and close to 30% report that they consume a sugar-sweetened beverage at least once per day.

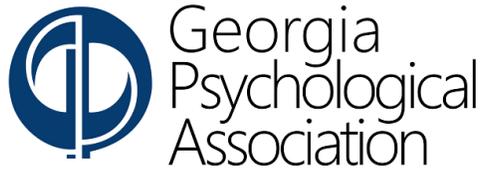
Dr. Kip Matthews, an Athens-based psychologist, states that healthy eating habits are established early in childhood. "With healthy dietary and lifestyles, children are much more capable of responding to the demands of school, have better emotional responses, and position themselves to live long, happy lives," says Matthews.

Psychologists can help parents implement strategies to guide their children in the process of developing life-long healthy behaviors.

Start early. Parents who help their children establish good eating, exercising and sleeping habits early in life will avoid having to break bad habits later. Exposing children to a variety of flavors can not only help children come to accept healthy foods but prefer them.

Make healthy eating easy. Research shows that daily environments like home, school and work can affect habits. Children generally choose foods that are familiar, easily available and ready to be eaten. Parents can encourage their kids to eat healthier by stocking the house and kids' lunch boxes with nutritious snacks like carrots, apples or nuts instead of chips or cookies

Set a good example. Children who see their parents or caregivers buying, cooking and eating healthy foods are more likely to eat wholesome foods themselves. Healthy eating doesn't need to be a trick. Instead, parents can teach their children by example to look at healthy foods as tasty and desirable. Try involving kids in planning, shopping and cooking meals to make it fun.



Have meals as a family. Research shows that social support has a direct impact on healthy eating intentions. Family meals are not only a good opportunity for families to connect. They are also the perfect venue to talk about healthy eating habits and engage children in conversations about what a nutritious meal looks and tastes like.

Be aware of kids' emotions. Support is essential when working with children to improve nutrition, especially when that path can be difficult and frustrating. Parents should pay close attention to children's emotions and reassure them that changes in diet are to make them healthy, and not because there is something wrong with them.

Dr. Matthews points out that the essential element to making these changes is social support. "For children, just like adults, it is critical that they are supported in their efforts to live healthier lives. Our role as parents is to provide that support through modeling and engagement with one another."

To learn more about mind/body health, visit the American Psychological Association at www.apa.org/helpcenter and follow @APAHelpCenter. To find out more about the Georgia Psychological Association, visit www.gapsychology.org.

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The American Psychological Association, in Washington, D.C., is the largest scientific and professional organization representing psychology in the United States. APA's membership includes more than 130,000 researchers, educators, clinicians, consultants and students. Through its divisions in 54 subfields of psychology and affiliations with 60 state, territorial and Canadian provincial associations, APA works to advance the creation, communication and application of psychological knowledge to benefit society and improve people's lives.