SWEET Success

California Diabetes and Pregnancy Program

Tip of the Month
~ # 15~

Reduce STRESS in Obese Families

The American Psychological Association has just released the findings from their yearly survey on stress. The data about stress and obesity is of particular concern for many of our Sweet Success moms and their families.

The APA found that many obese parents are reporting that they experience high levels of stress. These parents are more likely to have obese children and these children are modeling their parents' behaviors. Obese children in this study were found to report more often than normal weight children that their parents were "often worried and stressed."

The overweight children also "worried" more frequently about how they looked and what they weighed, and were found to be more likely to have physical health effects associated with stress and to not be able to manage that stress in healthy ways. The children attempted to manage their stress symptoms (trouble falling asleep, headaches, eating too much or too little, and feeling angry and getting into fights) by eating or taking a nap.

Parents can model healthy or unhealthy ways of managing stress to their offspring. Yet these parents are saying that they are having difficulty implementing changes that would improve their health and decrease their stress. The CEO of the APA has said "…stress could easily become our next public health crisis."

Here is what the APA is recommending to these families:

1. **Evaluate your lifestyle.**
2. **Talk about it.**
3. **Create a healthy environment.**
4. **Focus on yourself.**
5. **Change one habit at a time.**

"Talking about it" supportively and offering alternative lifestyle management choices are things we can all do with these families.

"APA Survey Raises Concern about Health Impact of Stress…" 2011