

NATION

94% UAE kids aware of healthy living: Study

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KT NANO EDIT

249 UAE CHILDREN SURVEYED

DUBAI — Children in the UAE have impressive knowledge around healthy eating and wellness despite rising childhood obesity rates, according to a study carried out this month.

A new study, conducted by Oman Insurance and Bupa Global and conducted by YouGov found that 64 per cent of children are aware that 30 minutes is the minimum recommended time to exercise every day. At least 94 per cent of children are aware that healthy living is about eating a balanced diet inclusive of all food groups, as well as exercising every day and sleeping well.

Furthermore, almost seven out of 10 children can differentiate the different food groups, and can tell which groups make up a balanced diet. However, only 31 per cent knew that obesity or diabetes can start as young as six years old.

Another 24 per cent of children believe playing video games, thinking really hard, watching a football match on TV or reading a book are also ways of exercising.

Over 36 per cent of children in the UAE are obese, and according to the World Obesity Federation, child obesity cases will continue to rise in the UAE, affecting 14.62 per cent of its '20 years and under' population by 2020, up from 12.40 per cent in 2013.

The study, conducted this month, looked at healthy living awareness levels and factors that influence the behaviour of children when it comes to developing and keeping healthy habits. The 249 children surveyed were between the ages of 6-11 and of different nationalities, representative of the Emirates' demographics.

It was conducted ahead of a series of healthy living workshops held on Sunday at the Repton School in Dubai. The workshops, led by Dr Amulya Saxena, a renowned expert on childhood obesity and consultant paediatric surgeon at Bupa Cromwell Hospital in the UK, promoted healthy living among Repton's students.

Speaking about the survey findings and the workshops, Karim Idilby, general manager for Bupa Global in Africa, India and the Middle East, said: "The level of awareness of healthy living among

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Thirty-six per cent of the children in the UAE are obese. But 94 per cent are aware that healthy living is about eating a balanced diet, exercise and sleep. So what keeps them from following it? Is it the stress, the lack of time due to excessive school work, or sheer laziness? It is time schools, students and parents took this up on a war footing, for only healthy bodies can house healthy minds.

the children surveyed is surprisingly high given the rising UAE obesity rate.

"However, there are still noteworthy gaps that need to be addressed to help children and their families live longer, healthier and happier lives. For this reason, we've organised these healthy living workshops.

"The main reasons for childhood obesity include easy access to unhealthy food, an increase in children's portion sizes, the rise of social media and children spending more time on their phones rather than outdoors," said David Cook, Headmaster at Repton School.

"However, childhood obesity is a global problem, not just a local one. Great efforts are being made around the world, in the UAE and on a home front here at Repton, where we offer a structured health education programme that focuses on health and wellbeing," he said.

"We have also seen a growing trend in more pupils participating in sports and physical activity over the last few years which is very promising, yet, there is always room for more and a need for constant education and encouragement," added Cook.

When it comes to habit-forming Dr Saxena said: "Children between ages six and 11 are at a key developmental phase in their life, both emotionally and physically. This is when children start forming their habits. It is very important to start building healthy habits in children as early as possible so they stand the best chance of forming lifelong habits. Parents should also try and become good diet and fitness role models for their children as they will be more likely to mirror this behaviour."

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24% Kids consider watching TV or reading a book an exercise



60% Kids would eat healthier food under parental control



62% children see their parents as their biggest role models



84% Kids know obesity happens from eating unhealthy food



87% Children know medicine is needed to battle diabetes

The level of awareness of healthy living among the children surveyed is surprisingly high given the rising UAE obesity rate. However, there are gaps that need to be addressed."

Karim Idilby, general manager, Bupa Global in Africa, India and the Middle East

THREE TOP TIPS FOR PARENTS TO MAINTAIN HEALTHY LIVING HABITS

- 1 Read nutrition labels and limit the child's intake of sugar. Children between the ages of four to six years old should only have 19 grammes of sugar (five sugar cubes) daily, whereas for children aged seven to 10 years the maximum intake is 24 grammes of sugar (six sugar cubes). Children aged 11 or older should not exceed 30 grammes of sugar (seven sugar cubes) per day.
- 2 Be aware of the child's body mass index (BMI), which is calculated by dividing the weight in kilogrammes (kg) by the height in metres (m), and then by dividing the answer by the height again. If the child's BMI is below 18.5, it means the child is underweight. If the child's BMI falls within the values 18.5-24.9, it means the child's BMI is healthy. However, if his or her BMI exceeds 25, then the child is considered overweight, and needs help and support to reach a healthier BMI.
- 3 Children should eat five fruits or vegetables and exercise at least 30 minutes every day. For example, whilst a healthy dinner is cooking, accompany them for a 30-minute walk.

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