NUTRITION AND
FITNESS FOR THE I/DD POPULATION

NJFSPC STATEWIDE MEETING 3/13/2021
MARGARET HEFFERLE BSN, RN & MELANIE AYERS, MSN, RN, NCSN
NUTRITION
A HEALTHY DIET…IT MAY NOT ALWAYS BE SO EASY

• Feeding & eating challenges
  • Affects 7 out of 10 children with autism
  • Affects up to 61% of babies with Down Syndrome

• Extremely restricted food habits
  • Food aversions
  • Hypersensitivities
  • OCD eating patterns
  • Anxiety
MORE NUTRITIONAL CHALLENGES

- Chronic overeating/Compulsive eating
  - Inability to sense when “full”
  - Eating as a soothing sensory behavior
  - Food used as a reward

- Impact of medications
  - Increased appetite/weight gain (meds for anxiety, depression, OCD)
  - Suppressed appetite/weight loss/poor sleep (meds for ADHD)
GI ISSUES

- Chronic constipation
- Bowel inflammation (diarrhea)
- Abdominal pain
- Gastroesophageal reflux
- Withholding
STRATEGIES

• Nutritionist referral
  • Nutritional guidance
  • Set up routines
  • Sneaking in vegetables
  • Keeping foods in “rotation”
• Feeding Therapist/Behavior Therapists
  • Oral motor or swallowing issues
  • Behavioral therapy
  • Feeding programs
  • Exercise programs (Kid Fit)
RESOURCES FOR EATING ISSUES/NUTRITION

- [https://www.autismspeaks.org/medical-conditions-associated-autism](https://www.autismspeaks.org/medical-conditions-associated-autism)
- Exploring Feeding Behavior in Autism
- [Autism Speaks Autism Treatment Network (ATN) has developed medical guidelines to help doctors recognize and manage these issues](https://www.autismspeaks.org)
- Guide for Managing Constipation in Children
- Pica: A Guide for Parents
- [https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/147/2/e20200462](https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/147/2/e20200462)
MORE NUTRITIONAL RESOURCES

- [https://www.ndss.org/resources/nutrition/](https://www.ndss.org/resources/nutrition/)
FITNESS
• Obesity is 2-3 times more prevalent in those with I/DD
  • Medications
  • Sedentary lifestyles
• Poorer health outcomes
  • Sedentary/inactivity leads to multimorbidity
  • Diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular disease
  • Health care costs associated with lack of physical activity $117 B nationally (all cause)
FACTORS

• Lack of motivation
• Acceptance of sedentary lifestyle
• Lack of caregiver support
• Transportation barriers
• Limited health promotion programs
**BENEFITS**

- Improved subjective health perspective
- Better fitness = better 5-year survival rates in adults over 50
- Decreased risk for chronic conditions
- Improved mental health
- Cost savings on the system
- Improved quality of life
STRATEGIES

• Find what interests them
• Include music and games as motivators
• Buddy/mentor programs
• Combination of muscle strengthening (weights/calisthenics/yoga) and aerobic (walking, running, dancing, bicycle, etc.); interval training
• Include health promotion/education
• Special Olympics Level I training for trainers SO Coaching Resources
• Virtual opportunities for fitness programs
REFERENCES


