

Every Kid Healthy

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 84 percent of children in the United States between the ages of five and 11 are either in very good or excellent health.

Not all children are as fortunate, though, and that's why Every Kid Healthy Week is necessary, to begin with. Held annually the last week of April, Every Kid Healthy Week puts an emphasis on celebrating wellness achievements of children from coast to coast.

Tanna L. McCullough, MSN and CNP at Lawrence County Memorial Hospital's Primary Care Clinic, says that in order to identify problems with youngsters, it's important for their parents to follow through with annual checkups with doctors.

"They need their yearly healthy kid checkups," McCullough said. "I really think that's the most important thing."

Just as newborns are checked out at one week, two weeks, one month, and so on, children need to be seen at least annually.

"They're supposed to have those checkups yearly," said McCullough. "Those will identify any problems they may have at the time. If they're lacking somewhere, or if their diet or BMI is off, we can identify it and address it."

Regular dental checkups are also important, McCullough says, as are eye exams.

"Dental care is a big issue," McCullough said. "Many children don't brush twice a day, and don't floss. Sometimes they go to bed with gunk in their mouth, and it sits there and harbors all night. That's a problem."

Childhood obesity is also becoming more and more of a concern. In the United States, the percentage of children and adolescents affected has more than tripled since the 1970s. Recent data shows that nearly one in five school children, aged six to 19, suffer from having excess body fat.

"Obesity is a huge problem," McCullough said. "We're in a constant battle, trying to deal with it."

McCullough said that in a lot of cases, parents are busy working, sometimes at more than one job, trying to provide for their families.

"A lot of times they don't have time to make a good, healthy meal that the family can sit down and enjoy," she said. "Fast food is coming into the mix, more and more frequently."

Inactivity is also a part of the problem. Rather than take part in a more physical activity, children will play games on a phone or some other device.

“I associate a lot of the problem with technology, gaming,” said McCullough. “Sometimes parents aren’t involved enough, and don’t push them to do other things.”

National advocates emphasize that Every Healthy Kid Week stresses the link between nutrition, physical activity and learning. Healthy kids, they note, are better prepared to learn at school.

“Children need to ride their bikes,” she said. “They need to explore, jump around, go to the playground. It’s very easy to occupy a child with a tablet or some other device, but later in life that could lead to problems.”

McCullough can be reached at the Lawrence County Memorial Hospital’s Primary Care Clinic by dialing (618) 943-7214.