



NEWS RELEASE

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DeCA dietitian joins fight against childhood obesity

*By Millie Slamin,
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NOTE: To see photographs related to DeCA's fight against childhood obesity, visit <http://www.flickr.com/photos/commissary/sets/72157625492747398/>.

FORT LEE, Va. – Childhood obesity in America has reached epidemic proportions, with the number of overweight children doubling over the past two decades. First lady Michelle Obama is championing the fight against childhood obesity with her “Let’s Move!” campaign, and the Defense Commissary Agency dietitian, Karen Hawkins, stands with her in the fight.

Hawkins has been actively involved in this battle by introducing ways for adults and children alike to make healthy food choices and encouraging them to engage in daily exercise. She has taken her quest to educate DeCA’s military audience to commissaries, publications and even to social networking sites, holding healthy food demonstrations, writing about the positive effects making healthy choices can bring, and “tweeting” with commissary patrons about how to maintain a healthy lifestyle.

Her goal is to make customers aware that there are healthy alternatives when making meals and even when selecting foods for snacks.

During an interview at Joint Base Andrews, Md., with the Pentagon Channel’s Master Sgt. Erin Roberts, Hawkins showed viewers how to make quick and easy healthy food choices from products sold at the base commissary. This interview can be viewed at

<http://www.tricare.mil/getfit> as part of DeCA’s partnership with the TRICARE health care

service to promote awareness of childhood obesity.

In the Pentagon Channel interview, the DeCA dietitian notes that although it's up to the parent to provide food for children to eat and for the child to determine when he or she has had enough, it's important for the parent to regulate the child's food intake as they get older to prevent them from overeating, which contributes to obesity.

"Portion sizes are small for children," Hawkins explained. "On average, they are about half the size of an adult's portion."

Keeping too much fattening food, soda and candy off the grocery list and adding more vegetables and fruits is one way to help children maintain a healthy weight and provide healthier snack foods, she recommended. "The best things that you can offer are whole-grain cereals that are high in fiber, mixed with fresh fruits or packaged fruit, and low-fat milk – whether it's fat-free or 1 percent. You can also add almonds or other nuts to get more proteins, fiber and fat. You could also make a yogurt parfait with either dry fruit or fresh fruit and cereal."

The lunch menu Hawkins offered featured fresh wraps made with lean meats and bagged salad; or nut butter with either jam or mashed banana, adding dry fruit; and fresh carrots or another vegetable with a low-fat dressing along with a few baked potato chips. Her dinner suggestions included frozen bagged meals, adding extra meats and vegetables to increase the amount of fiber and nutrients; tacos made from low-fat beef, lean ground chicken or turkey, adding beans to increase the protein content; and finally a corn tortilla with salsa and a salad.

She also recommended keeping a basket of snacks in the kitchen that include fresh or dried fruits, single-serving packs of apple sauce and low-calorie, whole-grain chips and cookies. "These snacks provide nutrients they need for their growing bodies," Hawkins said.

Two of DeCA's most recent health and wellness events took place at Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall Commissary, Va., and Joint Base Andrews Commissary, Md.

At Myer, while one group of 5-year-olds from the post child development center learned how to make fresh fruit shish kabobs and vegetable cornucopias using whole-grain tortillas, commissary employees teamed up with the post's child development center and Morale, Welfare and Recreation to treat the children to a morning of fun-filled exercises.

Hawkins explained that what they were doing with the children at this and other health and wellness events was to establish a foundation at an early age so they know how to make healthy choices throughout their lives.

"By educating the children, the community and the families about making healthy choices, the youth are more likely to continue these good habits as they get older," she said.

Eating healthy and exercising are both important aspects in winning the battle against childhood obesity and maintaining a healthy lifestyle, Hawkins said. That's why she is such a staunch supporter of the Let's Move campaign.

"The fight against childhood obesity involves the community supporting the families and providing education, as well as interventions, that help support the things they do at home," she said. "At the same time, we also can teach the adults to be healthier through these interactive events.

-DeCA-

About DeCA: *The Defense Commissary Agency operates a worldwide chain of commissaries providing groceries to military personnel, retirees and their families in a safe and secure shopping environment. Authorized patrons purchase items at cost plus a 5-percent surcharge, which covers the costs of building new commissaries and modernizing existing ones. Shoppers save an average of more than 30 percent on their purchases compared to commercial prices – savings worth more than \$4,400 annually for a family of four. A core military family support element, and a valued part of military pay and benefits, commissaries contribute to family readiness, enhance the quality of life for America's military and their families, and help recruit and retain the best and brightest men and women to serve their country.*