

Tips for Healthy Children and Families

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Raising a family isn't always easy. You are busy, and so are your children. There is a lot to do in little time. But the stakes are high. Today, many kids are overweight or obese. A healthy, active lifestyle can help maintain weight. It also can prevent health issues, such as diabetes, heart (heart) disease, asthma, and high blood (blood) pressure.

It is important to create healthy habits early on. These will help you make smart choices for your family. Children imitate their parents, so it's important to set a good example. The tips below can help your family be healthy and happy.

Path to improved health

Eating better (for children and families)

- Start the day with a healthy breakfast. It refuels the body and provides energy for the day.

- Let kids help plan and prepare 1 meal each week.
- Eat together as a family as often as possible.
- Take time eating, and chew slowly. It takes 20 minutes for the brain to tell the body that you are full.
- Eat more vegetables and fresh fruits. Aim for a total of 2 cups of fruit and 2 1/2 cups of vegetables each day.
- Eat more whole grains. Examples include oats, brown rice, rye, and whole-wheat pasta. Try to eat at least 3 ounces of whole grains each day.
- Drink plenty of fluids. Choose water, low-fat or nonfat milk, and low-calorie beverages.
- Serve a variety of foods.
- Serve food in small portions.

Eating better (for parents)

- Reward children with praise, not food.
- Do not demand or reward “a clean plate.” Let your children ask for more if they are still hungry.
- Read nutrition labels for serving size and This information can help you select foods that fit your family’s needs.
- Bake, broil, or grill foods to reduce
- Avoid cooking with butter or vegetable oil. Use healthier versions like olive, canola, or sunflower oil.
- Choose snacks that provide nutrients and energy. These are essential for active, growing children.
- Ask your doctor about vitamin (vitamin) supplements for you and your children.

Being more active (for children and families)

- Move more. Try to get between 30 and 60 minutes of physical activity each day. Short sessions of movement throughout the day add up.
- Include physical activity in your daily routine. Walk as a family before or after meals.
- Make playtime with your family fun. Be active by shooting hoops or playing tag.
- Be active in the home. For example, you can dust, vacuum, garden, or walk the dog. These activities are good ways to burn calories.
- Include activities, such as hiking or biking, when you go on vacation.
- Know your daily calorie needs. Balance calories you consume with calories you burn.
- Limit TV, computer, and video game time to less than 2 hours per day. Encourage physical activity instead.

Being more active (for parents)

- Park the car farther away at work or stores.
- Take the stairs instead of the elevator.
- Get off the bus one stop earlier and walk the rest of the way.
- Exercise while watching television at home. Use a machine, lift weights, and stretch.

- Walk to do errands.
- Be a role model for your children. Do something active every day.

How active are you?

Use the examples below to measure your level of activity. Get a mix of levels and try increasing over time.

| Moderate Moderate | Vigorous Vigorous | More vigorous More vigorous |
|------------------------------------|--|---|
| Moderate Walking | Vigorous Jogging | More vigorous Running |
| Moderate Treading water | Vigorous Swimming laps (light effort) | More vigorous Swimming laps (heavy effort) |
| Moderate Bicycling (10 mph) | Vigorous Bicycling (12 mph) | More vigorous Bicycling (more than 14 mph) |
| Moderate Dancing | Vigorous Low-impact aerobics | More vigorous Step aerobics |
| Moderate Yard work/gardening | Vigorous Mowing lawn with hand mower | More vigorous Digging a ditch |
| Moderate Hiking | Vigorous Playing doubles tennis | More vigorous Playing singles tennis |
| Moderate Vacuuming | Vigorous Moving furniture | More vigorous Playing basketball or soccer |
| Moderate Playing with children | Vigorous Weight lifting | More vigorous In-line skating |

Things to consider

Follow these additional tips to create a healthy lifestyle for you and your family.

- Keep a food journal. Track what you eat, how much, when, and why.
- Keep an activity log. Track your exercise: type, time, and level.
- Eat at the kitchen table. Avoid eating in the car or while watching TV. This helps you focus on how much you eat, and can help prevent overeating.
- Put workouts on your calendar so you keep them. Set exercise clothes out the night before.
- Set goals you can achieve. For example, aim to eat more vegetables and less high-calorie foods.
- Eat only when you're hungry. Do not eat because you are bored, tired, or stressed. Instead, create other habits. For example, take a walk, play a game, read a book, or call a friend.
- Try not to overeat. Once you aren't hungry anymore, push the plate away.
- Shop for groceries on a full stomach. This will help you make healthier food choices. It is harder to resist impulse or poor choices when your stomach is empty.

- Be smart about what you drink. Most drinks are empty calories.
- Choose water or low- or no-calorie drink options. A 32 oz. regular soda has up to 400 calories.
- Limit how much alcohol you drink.

Questions to ask your doctor

- How many calories should my kids and I eat each day?
- What types of physical activity do you recommend?
- Obesity and weight-related conditions run in my family. Does this mean my children are at increased risk?