Healthy Eating & Physical Activity Across Your Lifespan

Helping Your Child

TIPS FOR PARENTS

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES · USA
NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH
NIDDK NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF DIABETES AND DIGESTIVE AND KIDNEY DISEASES
WIN Weight-control Information Network

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INTRODUCTION

This booklet is part of the Healthy Eating & Physical Activity Across Your Lifespan Series from the Weight-control Information Network (WIN). The series offers health tips for readers at various life stages, including adulthood, pregnancy, parenthood, and later life. The entire series is also available in Spanish.

Visit WIN's website to view all WIN publications at *http://www.win.niddk.nih.gov.*

How can I use this booklet?

This publication is one of many handy guides from WIN that can help you and your family. You can use the tips in this booklet to take an active role in helping your child learn healthy habits.

Parents and other adults can guide children in making healthy food choices and becoming more physically active. One of the best ways to do this is to practice healthy eating and staying physically active as a family.

Practice staying physically active as a family.

How can a healthy pregnancy help my child?

Eating healthy, being physically active, and gaining a proper amount of weight during pregnancy can lead to fewer risks at delivery for both Mom and baby. Moms who achieve and maintain a healthy weight before and during pregnancy may also reduce their babies' later risks of obesity and other health problems.

How will healthy eating and physical activity help my child?

All children need healthy eating and physical activity. Healthy eating and physical activity may help children:

- Grow.
- Learn.
- Build strong bones and muscles.
- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Reduce future chances of developing diabetes and heart disease.
- Feel good about themselves.

All children need healthy eating and physical activity.

HEALTHY HABITS

How can I help my child form healthy habits?

Parents play a big part in shaping children's habits on eating and physical activity. When parents eat foods that are lower in fat and added sugars and high in fiber, children learn to like these foods as well. If your child does not like a new food right away, don't be upset. Children often need to see a new food many times before they will try it.

Parents have an effect on children's physical activity habits as well. See the end of this brochure for resources that can help you and your child. Continue reading to learn about specific actions you can take to help your child develop healthy habits.

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A powerful example for your child is to be active yourself.

Be a role model

A powerful example for your child is to be active yourself. You can set a good example by going for a walk or bike ride instead of watching TV, playing a video game, or surfing the Internet. Playing ball or jumping rope with your children shows them that being active is fun.

Talk about being healthy

Take the time to talk to your children about how a certain food or physical activity may help them. For example, when going for your daily walk, bring your children with you and let them pick the route. Discuss how walking helps you feel better and is a fun way to spend time together. It also offsets calories eaten and inactive time spent in front of TV screens or computers.

Use your children's food choices as teaching moments. Speak up when you see unhealthy eating habits. Direct children to healthier options or say, "You can have a little of that, but not too much." Talk to them about why an overly salty or heavily sugared snack is not the best choice.

You can also praise your children when they choose a healthy item like fruit or yogurt. Use comments like these:

- "Great choice!"
- "You're giving your body what it needs with that snack!"
- "I like those too."

Use your children's food choices as teaching moments.

With physical activity, try upbeat phrases like these to keep your child excited:

- "You run so fast, I can hardly keep up!"
- "You are building a strong, healthy heart!"
- "Let's walk 10 more minutes to make us stronger."

Believe in the power to change

Know that eating healthy and moving more are the basics of being fit. Work together as a family to form healthy habits.

Promote good health beyond your family

Other adults may play a role in your child's life, too. You can share ideas about healthy habits with them.

For instance, many parents work outside the home and need other adults to help with child care. Caregivers like other family members, day care providers, babysitters, or friends may shape your child's eating and activity habits. Talk to your child's caregivers to make sure they offer healthy snacks and meals. Check that caregivers are also

Make sure your child's caregivers offer healthy snacks and meals.

providing plenty of active playtime and limiting time with TV or inactive video games.

If your child is in school, you can help promote healthy eating and physical activity in several other ways:

- Find out more about the school's breakfast and lunch programs. Ask for input on menu choices.
- Support physical education and after-school sports at your child's school.
- Take turns with other parents watching your children play outside.

Consider other influences

Your children's friends and the media can also affect eating and activity choices. Children may choose to go to fast food places or play video games with their friends instead of playing tag or other active games. TV ads try to persuade children to eat high-fat foods and sugary drinks. You can teach your children to be aware of these pressures.

TV ads try to persuade children to eat high-fat foods and sugary drinks.

To do so, speak with your children about choices while you watch TV and surf the Internet with them. Talk about how media outlets sell products or values through famous football or basketball players, cartoon figures, and made-up images. Use programs and ads to spark chats about your values. These talks may help your child make healthy choices outside the home.

HEALTHY EATING

What should my child eat?

Just like adults, children need to eat a wide variety of foods. Every 5 years, the U.S. Government releases a set of guidelines on healthy eating (see Resources at the end of this booklet). The guidelines suggest balancing calories with physical activity. The guidelines also recommend improving eating habits to promote health, reduce the risk of disease, and reduce overweight and obesity.

The guidelines encourage Americans ages 2 years and older to eat a variety of healthy foods. Suggested items include the following:

- Fruits, vegetables, unsalted nuts and seeds, and whole grains
- Fat-free or low-fat milk and milk products
- Lean meats, poultry, seafood, beans and peas, soy products, and eggs

Like adults, children need to eat a wide variety of foods.

The guidelines also suggest reducing salt (sodium), refined grains, added sugars, and solid fats (like lard, butter, and margarine). Added sugars and solid fats often occur in pizzas, sodas, sugar-sweetened drinks, desserts like cookies or cake, and fast foods. These foods are the main sources of high fat and sugar among children and teens.

Another important guideline is to make sure your children eat breakfast to spark the energy they need to focus in school. Not eating breakfast is often linked to overweight and obesity, especially in children and teens.

Make sure your children eat breakfast to spark the energy they need to focus in school.

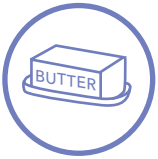
How can I help my child eat better?

Some tips to consider are these:

Use less fat, salt, and sugar

- Cook with fewer solid fats. Use olive or canola oil instead of butter or margarine. Bake or roast

Be mindful of how you use the following:



instead of frying. You can get a crunchy texture with "oven-frying" recipes that involve little or no oil.

- Choose and prepare foods with less salt. Keep the salt shaker off the table. Have fruits and vegetables on hand for snacks instead of salty snacks like chips.
- Limit the amount of sugar your child eats. Choose cereals with low sugar or with dried fruits as the source of sugar.

Reshape the plate

- Make half of what is on your child's plate fruits and vegetables.
- Avoid oversized portions.

The MyPlate icon and web address are provided courtesy of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Four for Fitness

Experts note that most Americans don't get enough **potassium**, **calcium**, **vitamin D**, and **dietary fiber**. Calcium builds strong bones and teeth. Potassium helps lower blood pressure and reduces bone loss. Vitamin D supports bone health. Dietary fiber promotes normal digestion and may help reduce the risk of heart disease, obesity, and type 2 diabetes.

Here are some ways you can boost your children's intake of these nutrients.

- Dish up more fruit for breakfast, snacks, and desserts. Add dark green, red, and orange vegetables to stews and soups. Add beans (black, kidney, pinto), peas, and lentils to casseroles and salads. For meal planning ideas and healthy recipes, see Nutrition.gov in the Resources at the end of this booklet.
- Serve more low-fat milk and milk products. If your child cannot digest much lactose, serve lactose-free products or fat-free milk and yogurt. (Lactose is the sugar in milk that may cause some people stomach pain and bloating when they drink milk or eat milk products.) Your child can also try soy or rice drinks enriched with calcium or vitamin D.
- Be active with your child outside in the sunlight to improve vitamin D levels naturally. Serve fresh, frozen, or canned salmon, shrimp, and light tuna (not albacore). For young children, you may serve fish in small portions totaling up to 12 ounces each week.
- Replace at least half of the refined grains (breads, pasta, rice) your child eats with whole-grain foods. Eat more bran. Check Nutrition Facts labels to find products high in dietary fiber. Look at the ingredients list to be sure that whole grains are one of the first items.

Try serving this

or this

Think about the drink

- Serve water or low-fat or fat-free milk more often as the drink of first choice.
- Reduce the amount of sugar-sweetened sodas and fruit-flavored drinks that your child drinks.
- Offer fresh fruit, which has more fiber than juice, more often than 100% fruit juice.

Offer healthy snacks

- Try to keep healthy food in the house for snacks and meals for the whole family.
- Offer such snacks as sliced apples, oranges, pears, and celery sticks. Or try whole-grain bread served with low-fat cheese, peanut butter, or soynut butter.
- Give your children a healthy snack or two in addition to their three daily meals to keep them energized.
- Read nutrition labels. Some foods, like snack bars, are not as healthy as they seem.

Limit fast food

- Order a side fruit bowl or salad instead of fries.
- Ask for sandwiches to be prepared without sauce.
- Order "small." Avoid super-sizing.

Share food time as family time

- Eat sit-down, family meals together and serve everyone the same thing.

Healthy Snack Ideas*

- Fresh, frozen, or canned vegetables or fruit served plain or with low-fat yogurt
- Pretzels or air-popped popcorn sprinkled with salt-free spice mix
- Homemade fruit smoothies made with fat-free milk or yogurt and frozen or fresh fruit
- Dry cereals (with no added sugars) served plain or with low-fat or fat-free milk

*Children of preschool age and younger can easily choke on foods. These foods may be hard to chew, small and round, or sticky. Examples are hard vegetables, whole grapes, hard chunks of cheese, raisins, nuts and seeds, and popcorn. Select snacks with care for children in this age group.

- Involve your children in planning and preparing meals. Children may be more willing to eat the dishes they help prepare.

Involve your children in planning and preparing meals.

- Try to limit how much you eat out to control the calories, salt, and fat your children eat. To serve more homemade meals, cook large batches of soup, stew, or casseroles and freeze them as a time saver. For handy tips on quick and easy homemade meals, check out the ChooseMyPlate information in the Resources section of this booklet.
- Limit eating at home to specific areas such as the kitchen or dining room.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

How does physical activity help my child?

Like adults, children should be physically active most, if not all, days of the week. Experts suggest at least 60 minutes of moderate physical activity daily for most children. Walking fast, bicycling, jumping rope, and playing basketball, soccer, or hopscotch are all good ways for children to be active. Parents play a big role in helping kids to get up and get moving.

Aim for your child to get at least 60 minutes of moderate physical activity each day.

How can I help my child be more active?

- Be a role model for your children. If they see you being physically active and having fun, they are more likely to be active and stay active.
- Involve the whole family in activities like hiking, biking, dancing, or playing basketball.
- Focus on fun. You can do a lot of walking during trips to the zoo or park.
- Include children in family activities like walking the dog, washing the car, or mowing the lawn.
- Sign your children up for after-school programs or lessons in a sport they enjoy.
- Team up with your children to play sports or dance video games that get everyone moving.

Reduce inactive screen time

Limit how much time your child is

- **watching TV**
- **playing video games**
- **listening to music on hand-held devices**

Sitting while using computers, hand-held devices, or TVs for hours at a time may reduce your child's active playtime. Limit your child's screen time watching TV, playing inactive computer and video games, or listening to music on hand-held devices while sitting down. Tips to reduce your child's screen time are these:

- Do not use screen time as a way to reward your child.
- Set up a family game night and turn off all the screens in your home.
- Eat meals together as a family. Do not eat in front of a screen.
- Limit TV time and remove TVs from your child's bedroom.

What should I do if my child is overweight or obese?

Children who are overweight are more likely to become adults who are overweight. These children may develop type 2 diabetes and other serious health problems. Weight problems can also lead to stress, sadness, and low self-esteem in children.

Because children grow at different rates at different times, it is not always easy to tell if a child is overweight. For example, it is normal for boys to have a growth spurt in weight and catch up in height later. Ask your health care provider

to measure your children to tell you if they are in a healthy range for their age and gender. If your provider tells you that your child is overweight, you can help.

How can I help my overweight child?

- Do not put your child on a diet to lose weight unless your health care provider tells you to.
- Avoid putting severe limits on what your child eats. Doing so may interfere with her or his growth.
- Accept and love your child at any weight. Doing so will boost self-esteem.

Accept and love your child at any weight. Doing so will boost self-esteem.

- Involve the whole family in healthy eating and physical activity habits.
- Help your child find ways other than food to handle setbacks or mark successes.
- Talk with your health care provider if you are concerned about your child's eating habits or weight.

Involve the whole family in healthy eating and physical activity habits.

Remember, you play the biggest role in your children's lives. You can help your children learn healthy eating and physical activity habits to follow for the rest of their lives. To download and share this and other WIN materials, visit *http://www.win.niddk.nih.gov*. More resources are listed on the following pages.

RESOURCES

American Academy of Pediatrics
141 Northwest Point Boulevard
Elk Grove Village, IL 60007–1098
Phone: 847–434–4000 or 1–888–227–1770
http://www.aap.org

Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics
120 South Riverside Plaza
Suite 2000
Chicago, IL 60606–6995
Toll-free number: 1–800–877–1600
http://www.eatright.org

ChooseMyPlate.gov
http://www.choosemyplate.gov

Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2010
U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
http://www.dietaryguidelines.gov

Food and Nutrition Information Center
USDA
National Agricultural Library
10301 Baltimore Avenue
Room 105
Beltsville, MD 20705–2351
Phone: 301–504–5414
http://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic

Let's Move!
http://www.letsmove.gov

Media Smart Youth
http://www.nichd.nih.gov/msy

National Diabetes Education Program
http://yourdiabetesinfo.org

Nutrition.gov
National Agricultural Library
Food and Nutrition Information Center
Nutrition.gov Staff
10301 Baltimore Avenue
Beltsville, MD 20705–2351
http://www.nutrition.gov

President's Council on Fitness, Sports & Nutrition
1101 Wootton Parkway
Suite 560
Rockville, MD 20852
Phone: 240–276–9567
http://www.fitness.gov
http://www.presidentschallenge.org

We Can! (Ways to Enhance Children's Activity and Nutrition)
National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute Health Information Center
Attention: Website
P.O. Box 30105
Bethesda, MD 20824–0105
Toll-free number: 1–866–359–3226
http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/obesity/wecan

Weight-control Information Network
1 WIN Way
Bethesda, MD 20892–3665
Phone: 202–828–1025
Fax: 202–828–1028
Toll-free number: 1–877–946–4627
Email: WIN@info.niddk.nih.gov
http://www.win.niddk.nih.gov

Inclusion of resources is for information only and does not imply endorsement by NIDDK or WIN.

Why should I participate in clinical trials?

Participants in clinical trials can play a more active role in their own health care, gain access to new research treatments before they are widely available, and help others by contributing to medical research. For more information, visit *http://www.clinicaltrials.gov*.

The **Weight-control Information Network (WIN)** is a national information service of the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK), part of the National Institutes of Health (NIH). WIN provides the general public, health professionals, and the media with science-based, up-to-date, culturally relevant materials and tips. Topics include healthy eating, barriers to physical activity, portion control, and eating and physical activity myths.

Both NIDDK scientists and outside experts review publications produced by WIN. This publication was reviewed by Sandra G. Hassink, M.D., F.A.A.P., Director of the Nemours Obesity Initiative and Assistant Professor of Pediatrics at the A. I. duPont Hospital for Children in Wilmington, DE.

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The Lifespan Series includes the following publications:

- Fit for Two: Tips for Pregnancy
- Helping Your Child: Tips for Parents
- Better Health and You: Tips for Adults
- Young at Heart: Tips for Older Adults

Spanish-language publications in the Lifespan Series include the following:

- Consejos para la futura mamá
- Cómo ayudar a su hijo
- Cómo mejorar su salud: consejos para adultos
- Sugerencias para personas mayores

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