
Tips for parents

Help your child learn healthy habits

Obese children and teens are much more likely to become obese adults. Nearly 1 in 3 children in America is overweight or obese. And 1 in 3 children born in 2000 or later will suffer from type 2 diabetes at some point in their lives.

Others will face chronic obesity-related health problems like heart disease, high blood pressure, cancer, and asthma. Overweight children are also at increased risk for emotional and social problems.

Children today may even be on track to have a shorter lifespan than their parents.

Follow the daily 5-2-1-0 rule:

- 5 (or more) servings of fruit and veggies
- 2 hours (or less) of screen time
- 1 hour of physical activity
- 0 sugar-sweetened drinks

Help your kids stay active

Helping your kids be physically active can prevent weight problems from developing or getting worse.

- Make physical activity a part of your family's daily life. Walk to school together, take the dog for a walk, go for a bike ride, or play catch together.
- Create opportunities for your child or teen to be active for 60 minutes every day. Sports teams are a great way to make sure they're getting regular exercise.
- Kids and teens are naturally active, but they often spend hours in front of televisions and computers. Limit TV and video games to less than 2 hours a day, and keep the TV out of your child's bedroom. Experts recommend no screen time for children under 3. Get tips for reducing screen time.
- Remember that even a little physical activity can make a big difference in your child's weight and health over time.
- Make sure your child gets at least 8 or 9 hours of sleep a night. Kids need lots of sleep to stay active and regulate hunger.

Encourage healthful eating

Model the healthy eating habits you want your children to follow. Making healthy meals is smart for the whole family, not just overweight children and adults. Teach your kids about healthy nutrition with these tips:

- Show your love and acceptance no matter what your child's shape or size. Try not to single out an overweight child. Avoid words like "skinny" and "fat" or teasing children about weight.
- Start the day with a healthy breakfast.
- Eat meals together at the table, and keep the TV off during mealtimes.
- Give water to your thirsty little athletes instead of soda or sports drinks.
- Help kids avoid junk food cravings by keeping it out of the house and limiting processed and fast foods.
- If you're pregnant, plan on breastfeeding your baby. Studies show breastfed babies are at a lower risk of being overweight later in life.
- Never use food as a reward or punishment.



You are responsible for what, where, and when your child eats. But let your child decide how much to eat. This allows children to tune into their own appetites and learn to stop eating when they feel full.

Children don't need to eat as much as adults. Avoid the temptation to make kids "clean their plates" before leaving the table.

What's on your child's plate?

- After age 2, limit saturated fats (such as whole milk, cheese, ice cream, and hot dogs) in your child's diet.
- Encourage children to try healthy foods. Don't give up if your child doesn't like a particular food. It takes 8 to 10 times tasting a new food before a child should decide if he or she likes it.
- Treats like fast food, chips, candy, and cookies are okay from time to time, but not as part of your child's daily diet.
- If healthy lunches and snacks are not provided at your child's school or day care, pack nutritious foods for them. Letting children participate in preparing their own lunches teaches them to make wise food choices.
- Avoid soda, sports and caffeinated energy drinks, juice, and sweetened drinks. Choose healthy beverages instead.
- Make fruits and vegetables available at every meal. Try to serve meals where fruits and vegetables cover half of your child's plate. Find new ways to add in fruits and veggies.
- Offer nutritious meals and healthy snacks in age-appropriate portions. Plan for a meal or snack every 4 to 5 hours but not more than every 2 hours.
- Know what your childcare providers are feeding your children. Play a part in planning a healthy menu, if possible.

Healthy teenagers

The teenage years can put a lot of pressure on your family. Issues of weight and body image and the natural changes your child goes through can be hard on both you and your teen.

Keeping healthy foods in the house and teaching your teen about eating well can help ensure he or she is also picking smart food options away from home.

Hand over some meal planning duties, or let your teen decide on family activities that get everyone moving.

Get the conversation started with healthy eating tips for teens and young adults.

Kid zone

Get ready to play! Check out the Amazing Food Detective — a game that teaches healthy eating habits.

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Reviewed by: Adam Tsai, MD, November 2018

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