

Tips for Healthy Children and Families



Raising a family isn't easy. We realize you are busy, and so are your children. But the stakes are high. Establishing a healthy lifestyle while they are young is important.

A healthy, active lifestyle can help maintain a proper weight. It also can prevent health issues, such as diabetes, heart disease, asthma, and high blood pressure.

It is important to create healthy habits early on. These will help you make smart choices for your family. Children will 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 one meal each week
- eat together as a family as often as possible
- take time eating, and chew slowly. It takes twenty minutes for the brain to tell the body that you are full



- eat more vegetables and fresh fruits. Aim for a total of two cups of fruit and two and a half cups of vegetables each day
- eat more whole grains. Examples include oats, brown rice, rye, and whole-wheat pasta. Try to eat at least three 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 in small portions

Eating better (for parents)

- reward children with praise, not food
- do not demand or reward your children for “a clean plate,” let your children ask for more if they are still hungry
- read [nutrition labels](#) for serving size. This information can help you select foods that fit your family’s needs
- bake, broil, or grill foods
- 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

Being more active (for children and families)

- move more. Try to get between thirty and sixty 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. You can be active by shooting hoops or playing tag
- be active in the home. You can dust, vacuum, garden, or walk the dog, for example. These activities are good ways to burn calories
- include activities, such as hiking or biking, when you go on vacation
- know your own [daily calorie needs](#). Balance calories you consume with calories you burn
- limit your TV, computer, and video game time to less than two 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. You can use a machine, lift weights, and stretch
- walk to do errands
- be a role model for your children. Do something active every day

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 your 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. Don’t 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, you should push the plate away
- shop for groceries on a full stomach. This will help you make healthier food choices. It’s 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 thirty-two ounce 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?

How active are you?

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

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

