

Teacher Toolkit

What can the teachers in my school do together to improve physical activity and healthy eating?

1. Assess your school's policies on physical education and activity and nutrition environments using the CDC's [School Health Index](#). Using your data, improve the physical activity and nutrition environments in your school.
 - Ensure that school policy does not allow physical activity to be withheld as punishment.
 - Review policies for food brought in from outside of school for parties, such as encouraging parents to bring fruits or other non-food treats for celebrating birthdays. Not only does this reinforce good nutrition, it is also helpful to students with food allergies.
 - Consider what is being sold through fundraisers and choose companies that provide non-food options, such as plants, candles, or wrapping paper.
2. Review [CDC's Physical Activity Guidelines Toolkit](#) for more ideas on promoting physical activity. This toolkit also includes attractive posters for the school.
3. Create a school health advisory council, which should include students. Ensure that students are part of the decision-making process, as appropriate.
4. Learn about what resources exist in the community for promoting physical activity and healthy eating. Ask:
 - Are there parks or woods nearby that we can walk to as part of a lesson?
 - Is there a National Park or Forest nearby that we could work with on outdoor education lessons?
 - Are there community centers, such as a YMCA or Boys and Girls Club that we could work with to coordinate after-school efforts?
 - Could we use community trails during breaks or recess?
 - Are there grocery stores or restaurants nearby that we could work with to learn more about food and healthy cooking and eating?
 - Is there an apple orchard or farm nearby that we could visit? (contributed by Edward Hall, pre-school teacher)
 - Is there a hospital, community health clinic, or medical or public health school that could help introduce our students to health concepts and talk about medical careers?
 - Do we have a local 4H club or Cooperative Extension Service that could visit our school on a regular basis?
 - Is there a business in town that would sponsor my after-school sports team?
5. Collaborate with your local health department, transportation, and law enforcement agencies to create "walk to school" events or "walking school buses" (see

<http://www.cdc.gov/healthyweight/index.html>) to encourage children and parents to walk to local schools.

- If necessary, start by conducting a “walkability assessment” of the area around your school to identify unsafe crossings, broken sidewalks, or other environmental factors that deter walking. The Department of Transportation’s National Highway Traffic Safety Administration offers a “[walkability checklist](#)” that your community can use.
 - Review school policies to see if your school allows and encourages students to walk or bike to school.
 - Consider working with a local business or store if your school needs supplies, such as bike racks.
6. Incorporate messages and concepts about nutrition and physical activity into lessons, such as discussing energy balance in science classes.
- Younger students can assess the difference in calories between “nutrient-rich” and “nutrient-poor” foods and chart how these foods make them feel after eating them.
 - Older students can design and execute a research study measuring the effects of physical activity on academic performance, using their class and another class as a control group.
 - Have students assess and rate their school food systems, create rating scales and then write about their findings. (Contributed by the US Department of Education’s Teacher Ambassador Fellows)
7. Evaluate worksite policies for teachers and other school staff.
- With the information, consider making changes to create healthier workplace, such as by including incentives for physical activity or walking or biking instead of driving to school.
 - Conduct “walking meetings,” or make athletic facilities and equipment available to staff after hours.
8. Have a contest in the school for how many steps students and teachers can walk or for the amount of activity done. (contributed by Meghan French, high school biology teacher)
- Combine language arts lessons with walking, such as assigning books about foreign lands and have students chart steps to that country. The first class to get there first would win.
 - Combine organizing service learning with walking or other activities, such as doing a walkathon or a jump rope contest for a chosen charity or local organization.
9. Collect healthy recipes from families in the school and create a school cookbook, which can be sold as a fundraiser in the community.
- If possible, ask parents to share recipes from their childhood and tell a story about how the recipe reminds them of growing up. Have students record their parents’ stories and illustrate the cookbook and stories.

- Partner with a local bookstore to have them sell the cookbook in the store.
10. To the extent practicable, work with families of students with disabilities to ensure that physical activities are part of the student’s learning plan, during and after school. Develop relationships in the community to help meet the needs of these students if the school does not have them available. More resources on students with disabilities can be found at the [National Center on Physical Activity and Disability](#).

What can I do in my classroom to promote physical activity and healthy eating?

1. Add physical activity into your classroom.
 - North Carolina has developed a set of classroom “[energizers](#)” that can be downloaded for free.
 - For younger students, create a healthy food relay race: With three baskets, place two on one the other side of the room or playground and one on the other. A student picks something out of the basket, and he either has to put it in a healthy food basket or a junk food basket. Two teams or more, whoever finished the fastest gets a prize. Finish up with a healthy snack and water! (contributed by Caitlin Hall, pre-school teacher)
2. Incorporate movement into lessons.
 - For example, if teaching about verbs, have students act out the verb by moving around the classroom.
 - In a language classes, have students toss the ball around when conjugating verbs. (contributed by Patricia Parker, middle school French teacher)
3. Have a pitcher of water in the classroom.
4. Plant an outside or inside fruit, vegetable, or herb garden that students are responsible for tending to and growing. Enjoy the “fruits” of your labor at harvest time!
 - Help students develop a partnership with local businesses, parents, or other community groups, such as the Cooperative Extension Service if resources are an issue. Many communities have “master gardener” programs that could help.
5. Establish classroom “rules” and expectations around food and activity.
 - Promote healthy food for celebrations.
 - Do not make students do push-ups or other activities as punishment and do not keep students from being active, such as keeping them in from recess, as punishment
6. Make sure that all students in the class can be active to the best of their ability. If supports are needed for students with special needs, work with the student’s family and school personnel to ensure these supports are provided.

- If you know a student has asthma, for example, talk with the student and his/her family, and school health personnel if available, to make sure that that student has an [asthma action plan](#) and that you and his/her other teachers understand the potential impact of activity on asthma symptoms, asthma triggers, and how to respond to an emergency situation. If you need additional training, you can talk with school administrators, the local or state health department, or local pediatricians for more guidance.
7. Do not accept bullying behavior anywhere, at any time, in the school.
 - [StopBullying.gov](#) provides tools for teachers.
 8. For elementary school teachers, engage with students during recess instead of watching. Some students don't know how to play games such as four square or hopscotch and may need some gentle instruction. Jumping rope is great fun—and great exercise!
 9. Learn more about a sport or activity of interest, such as soccer, biking, or even walking and become a coach for an after-school team or a sponsor of an after-school club.
 10. Lead by example. Walk with your students, and eat with them.