

Let's Move - Parents Take Action

5 simple steps to success for Parents

Parents and caregivers can set a great example for the whole family by creating a healthy environment at home. Making fruits and vegetables part of every meal, limiting treats, walking and playing, even shopping together - any combination of steps can add up to make a real difference and help build healthy habits for life.

1. Healthy Snacks

Great snacks and ways to cut sugar and fat from your diet.

A busy family can benefit from food that's nutritious and easy to eat on-the-go, like fresh fruits and vegetables. Fruits and vegetables are a natural source of energy and give bodies the nutrients they need to keep going.

Think Color

Fruits and vegetables are great sources of many vitamins and minerals, and can help prevent chronic diseases. Try eating fruits and vegetables of different colors to give your family a wide range of valuable nutrients like fiber, folate, potassium, and vitamins A and C. Some examples include green spinach, orange sweet potatoes, black beans, yellow corn, purple plums, red watermelon, and white onions.

Encourage children to try new fruits and vegetables regularly.

Children and families tend to consume more the foods that they have easy access to. Keep fruits and vegetables within reach and you're more likely to make healthy choices.

Tip: Replace a candy dish with a fruit bowl.

Tip: Store especially tempting foods, like cookies, chips, or ice cream, out of immediate eyesight, like on a high shelf or at the back of the freezer. Move the healthy food to the front at eye level.

Ideas to Eat More Fruits and Vegetables Every Day

Eat fruit raw to enjoy its natural sweetness.

Canned or frozen fruits and vegetables are good options when fresh produce is not available. Be careful to choose those without added sugar, syrup and cream sauces.

Choose whole fruit over fruit drinks and juices. Fruit juices have lost fiber from the fruit. It's better to eat the whole fruit because it contains the added fiber that helps you feel full.

2. Make Physical Activity a Part of Your Family's Routine

The best way to increase physical activity in your family life is for you to be a part of it. Activities should be fun and something that the whole family can do together. Kids need at least 60 minutes of physical activity a day, but it doesn't have to be all at one time. Short walks, active chores, walking the dog—it all adds up! Make physical activity a project that the whole family can enjoy together. Encourage everyone to think of fun things to do to get off the couch, away from TV and computer screens and get moving!

Set Goals

Establish goals that you and your family can achieve. The family can come up with activity and set goals together. In the first few weeks, you may not achieve every goal, but if you stick with it, physical activity will become a part of your family's routine.

Tip: Effective goals are specific, achievable and forgiving. "Exercise more" is a great idea, but "take a 30 minute walk" is more specific and easier to achieve.

Schedule it

The best way to begin is to schedule time for physical activity. Start by identifying at least three 30-minute time slots this week for activities like taking a walk, playing sports or doing active chores. Choose times of the day or week when everyone is most likely to stick to the schedule.

Add it up

Download the Let's Move Family Calendar and personalize it for your family. Post it on the refrigerator or somewhere the whole family can view it and track progress. Remember, every little bit counts.

Be Flexible

If a conflict comes up during physical activity time -- don't cancel, reschedule. Find a new time for the activity to replace the time that you missed.

Share it

To keep the momentum going, share your new activities, ideas, and tools with friends, neighbors and relatives. Invite them to join in and get moving too!

Ideas to get Started

There are countless ways to enjoy physical activity together as a family:

- Play tag, swim, toss a ball, jump rope, hula-hoop, dance to music—or even play a dancing video game. It doesn't have to be sports, just get your family moving!
- Walk the dog, go for a jog, go on a bike ride, stake the stairs, or head to the park and let kids run around for a while.

- Celebrate special occasions—birthdays, anniversaries—with something active, such as a hike, a volleyball or soccer game, or playing Frisbee at the park.
- Get the whole family involved in household chores, like cleaning, vacuuming, and yard work.
- Park further away. Count the steps with your children it takes from the car to the destination. Write it down. See if you can park even further away on your next stop.
- Walk instead of drive, whenever you can. If you have to drive, find a spot at the far end of the parking lot—the most distant from you are going.
- Train as a family for a charity walk or run.

What is your family doing to stay active? Tell us on Facebook and your family's physical activity may be featured on the Let's Move website.

3. Plan a Healthy Menu

Get children involved in planning and cooking.

Eating nutritious meals in right-size portions will help children and families be healthier and will provide energy to power through the day. Preparing healthy meals doesn't have to be difficult or expensive; it just takes planning. Get your children involved in planning and cooking and you'll be surprised by how easy making healthy changes can be.

Plan to Eat Healthy

Sit down as a family and plan your healthy meals for the week, then make a shopping list and stick to it!

Healthy decisions start at home and planning ahead can improve your health while saving you time and money. Have everyone in your family make suggestions for the shopping list. Kids (and adults too!) are more willing to try new foods when they help pick them.

Cut Back on Sugar

Reducing sugar intake for your family is easier than you think. Sodas are liquid sugar sources that don't fill us up. Substitute water for soda and juice with added sugar and your family will be one sip closer to better health.

Ideas for healthier drinks

- Switch to low-fat milk or 100% fruit juice for a beverage with vitamins and minerals.
- Switch to water or diluted 100% fruit juice.

Tip: A serving size for sodas, sports drinks, fruit drinks and smoothies fits in a small coffee cup.

Have a Healthy Breakfast

Make sure children eat a healthy breakfast every day. A nutritious breakfast is a good way to start the day and it can help prevent overeating and snacking later. Offer children options like whole-grain cereal with low-fat or fat-free milk, fruit or oatmeal to start the day off right.

Healthy Breakfast Ideas

- Stir low-fat or fat-free granola into a bowl of low-fat or fat-free yogurt. Top with sliced apples or berries.
- Add strawberries, blueberries, or bananas to whole-grain waffles, pancakes, cereal, oatmeal, or toast.
- Top toasted whole-grain bread with a thin layer of peanut butter and sliced bananas.
- Add vegetables like bell peppers, broccoli, spinach, mushrooms or tomatoes to an egg or egg white omelet.

Tip: Canned, dried, and frozen fruits and vegetables are good options. Look for fruit without added sugar or syrups and vegetables without added salt, butter or cream sauce.

Keep an Eye on Portion Sizes

Know when servings are larger than needed and teach children to eat only what they need at each meal. The more you know about serving sizes, the more you will be able to help children learn to serve themselves a healthy amount of food.

Ideas to Eat Healthy Portions

- Use smaller plates and bowls at home.
- Buy smaller packages of snack foods.
- 'Batch cook' and divide prepared recipes into the number of servings specified before eating. Save or freeze leftovers.
- Always eat off a bowl or plate. Put standard servings in a bowl or on a plate. Don't eat out of the carton or bag - it's too easy to keep going.

Tip: Trust your body to tell you when you've had enough, but remember it takes about 20 minutes for your body to send you "full" signals.

When families sit down and eat together, children are more likely to eat more fruits and vegetables and less junk food. Plan and make healthy, affordable meals for the family. Keep the television off and sit at the table and enjoy talking together.

Additional Resources

- Substitutes:
http://www.health.gov/dietaryguidelines/dga2005/healthieryou/html/tips_healthy_subs.html
- Know how many fruits and veggies to eat and get fun recipes!:
<http://www.fruitsandveggiesmatter.gov/>
- Let's Cook!: Improve your culinary skills with fruits and veggies!
<http://apps.nccd.cdc.gov/dnparecipe/recipesearch.aspx>
- Let's Count!:or How much fruits and veggies should we be eating?
<http://www.fruitsandveggiesmatter.gov/>
- A Healthier You: Recipes for the Family:

<http://www.health.gov/dietaryguidelines/dga2005/healthieryou/html/recipes.html>

4. Reduce Screen Time and Get Active

Health experts say computer and television time at home should be limited to one to two hours or less per day (and avoided entirely for kids under two), unless it's work or homework-related. The time spent in front of the screen could be better spent being more physically active.

Parents and caregivers should set rules that limit the amount of time children spend on the computer, watching TV, and playing video games to reduce screen time.

Talk to Your Family

Explain to children that it's important to sit less and move more in order to stay healthy.

Set Screen Time Limits

Create a house rule that limits screen time to two hours every day. More importantly, enforce the rule.

Set a Good Example

You need to be a good role model and limit your screen time to no more than two hours per day, too. If your kids see you following your own rules, they're more likely to do the same.

Log Screen Time vs. Active Time

Track how much time your family spends in front of a screen, including things like watching TV and movies, playing video games, and using the computer (outside of school or work). Then look at how much time the family spends doing physical activities and you'll get a sense of what changes need to be made. Download the Let's Move screen time log to track how much time everyone is spending in front of a screen.

Make Screen Time = Active Time

When you do spend time in front of the screen, do something active. Stretch, practice yoga poses, walk on a treadmill or lift weights. Challenge the family to see who can do the most push-ups or jumping jacks during commercial breaks.

Create Screen-free Bedrooms

Don't put a TV or computer in your child's bedroom. Kids who have TVs in their room tend to watch about 1.5 hours more TV a day than those that don't. Plus, it keeps them in their room instead of spending time with the rest of the family.

Make Meal Time = Family Time

Turn off the TV during meals. Better yet, remove the TV from the eating area if you have one there. Family meals are a great time to talk to each other. Research shows that families who eat together tend to eat more nutritious meals. Make eating together a priority and try to have family meals at least two to three times a week. Begin with breakfast—it's a great way to start the day.

Provide Alternatives

Watching TV can become a habit, making it easy to forget what else is out there. Give children ideas and alternatives, like playing outside, picking up a new hobby, or learning a sport. See more tips for getting physically active.

Don't Use TV Time as Reward or Punishment

Practices like this make TV seem even more important to children.

Understand TV Ads

Seeing snack foods, candy, soda, and fast food on television affects all of us, especially children. Help kids understand that just because it's on TV—or their favorite TV characters eat or drink it—doesn't mean it's good for you.

5. Organize a School Health Team

The school environment strongly impacts the behavior, health and well-being of children. Parents can help schools create an environment that will encourage a child's overall academic success by taking action.

Join the School Health Team

All schools that receive support from the USDA are required to develop wellness policies that address school food service and physical activity. Many schools have working groups dedicated to improving the school's health programs and policies. Although these working groups go by different names across the country—School Health Team, School Health Council, School Health Advisory Council, Wellness Council—parent members play a crucial role in creating a healthful school environment.

Call your child's school and talk to the principal or the PTA president to find out if the school has an active health team. If it does, learn how you can become a member. If the school doesn't have a health team, help organize one.

Identify the Current Status

The School Health Index (SHI) is a self-assessment and planning tool that can be used to identify the strengths and weaknesses of health policies and programs and develop an action plan for improving student health. Visit CDC's website to learn more about implementing the School Health Index at your child's school (<http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/SHI/introduction.htm>).

Understand "Competitive Foods"

Foods and beverages provided through school breakfast, lunch, and afterschool snack programs must meet certain nutritional rules to receive federal money. However, many schools also sell foods outside of the USDA school meals—in the cafeterias, snack bars, vending machines—that are not subject to federal rules. These foods are called "competitive foods" because they compete with school meals. Children can purchase non-nutritious foods in place of the USDA school meal.

Foods commonly available in these venues include cookies, crackers, pastries, and other high-fat baked goods, as well as salty snacks and sports drinks. Opportunities for competitive foods should be limited. If competitive foods are available, they should consist primarily of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and fat-free or low-fat milk and milk products. The School Health Team can help establish policies that implement the nutritional standards for foods sold outside of school meals.

Identify a Couple Easy Actions

The actions chosen by the school health team should be important but doable. Other schools have started the process of continuous improvement. Read some of their success stories:

Celebrate Success

Working with the School Health Team should be fun. Celebrate your success at making the nutrition choices better for your child.

Identify the Next Step

There are always ways to improve the school nutrition program. Look at it as a process, not a goal to achieve!

Resources

Learn more about the Coordinated School Health program on CDC's website. (<http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/CSHP/>)

Find more action steps to implement school nutrition services at the Education Development Center website. (http://www2.edc.org/makinghealthacademic/Concept/actions_nutrition.asp)