

# Encouraging Childhood Nutrition and Fitness

It is important for children to learn good eating and exercise habits early in life. Healthy food choices, child-sized portions and active lifestyles are the keys to preventing obesity.

## TIPS FOR HEALTHY EATING HABITS

- ▶ Eating a healthy breakfast is a good way to start the day and may be important in achieving and maintaining a healthy weight.
- ▶ After 2 years of age, children should drink fat-free or low-fat milk or water. Drinks with added sugars, such as soft drinks, fruit juice drinks, and sports drinks should be limited.
- ▶ Children need to eat frequently to keep up energy and growth. They are hungry after school and usually need a snack before dinner. Give fresh fruit and vegetables for snacks instead of chips, cookies and sodas which are high in fat, calories or added sugars and low in essential nutrients. At the same time, don't restrict all "bad" treats or kids may obsess over them.
- ▶ Offer whole grains as much as possible. Good sources are cereals, bagels, rice cakes and graham crackers.
- ▶ Eat at least one meal a day as a family. Children learn healthy eating habits from your example.
- ▶ Discourage eating meals or snacks while watching TV.
- ▶ Avoid the use of food as a reward.
- ▶ Avoid withholding food as a punishment.
- ▶ When feeding children remember that child portion sizes are smaller than those for adults. Also, it is much easier to get a child to try a new food if there is only a little on the plate.

## TIPS FOR GETTING EXERCISE

- ▶ Kids are more active when television, video games and other sedentary activities are limited. The American Academy of Pediatrics suggests limiting screen time to no more than one to two hours of quality TV and videos a day for older children and no screen time for children under the age of two.
- ▶ Be a role model for your kids by taking part in active play. Take theme walks or walk to nearby destinations, such as a store or a friend's house. Schedule weekly family activities like playing basketball, riding bikes, or visiting a park or playground.
- ▶ Schools can be resources for team sports and other after-school programming. Find out what is offered. Other free or inexpensive avenues are city park and recreation programs, YMCA, and Girls and Boys Clubs.
- ▶ Check out library books and videos about sport instruction or athletes. This may help and inspire children and help them build confidence in their abilities.

## BEAUTY REST

Too little rest can mean overeating to keep going, as well as being too tired to exercise. Children ages 7 to 18 need 9 hours of sleep; younger kids need more. Set a consistent, early bedtime for children.

For additional information, visit [www.cdc.gov/health/nutrition.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/health/nutrition.htm) and [www.health.gov](http://www.health.gov). For more specific advice on your child's nutrition and activities, talk to your doctor.



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