

Making Healthy Connections With Your Family



Good health starts with eating the right foods and getting plenty of physical activity. A healthier lifestyle may help your family in many ways, including the following:

- Less stress, depression, and anxiety
- Better sleep and more energy
- Less disease and lower health-care costs

Healthy habits don't have to take time away from your family. Do it together and make it fun!

Eating Well

Children learn their future eating habits from watching you. Set a good example, and set the stage for a lifetime of good health. Consider the following tips:

- Family meals are an important time to connect with your children. Offer a variety of healthy foods. Then focus on what your children are saying rather than what they are eating.
- Allow children to decide how much to eat based on their hunger. Let go of “clean plate” expectations.
- Reward your children with attention and kind words instead of food. Comfort them with hugs, not sweets.
- Plan, shop, and cook more meals at home together. Involve children in choosing, washing, and (for older children) cutting and cooking fruits and vegetables.
- Let kids invent their own healthy recipes. No-fail options include trail mix, smoothies, and fruit salads.
- Having difficulty providing enough healthy food for your family? Apply for food stamps or WIC benefits, or check out local food banks to ease your budget.

Physical Activity

Children and teens need 60 minutes or more of physical activity each day. For adults, aim for at least 30 minutes per day, most days of the week. Try the following suggestions to increase your whole family's activity level:

- Find activities you enjoy and do them as a family. Shoot hoops, dance, swim, or rollerblade—it doesn't matter what you do, as long as you are moving together.
- Support your children's participation in sports by helping them practice. Kick soccer balls while your child plays goalie, or hit pop-ups for her to catch.
- Take a family walk after dinner instead of turning on the TV. Make up games for younger children, such as “I spy” or “Who can count the most ... [e.g., red cars]”. With school-age kids and teens, use the time to ask how things are going at school or with friends.
- Walk or bike with your child to and from school.
- Set family challenges, such as completing a “mud run” or a long hike together. Celebrate when you reach your goals.
- Local community centers often offer free or low-cost exercise classes, clubs, teams, and other activities for children and families. Many offer sliding-scale memberships.

Remember: Making a commitment to health together is more fun than doing it alone ... and it can bring your family closer together.

This tip sheet was adapted using information from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's ChooseMyPlate.gov (<http://choosemyplate.gov>). At <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/preventing/promoting/parenting/> you can download this tip sheet and get more parenting tips, or call 800.394.3366.