

Tips for Parents

How to Help Children Grow Up Healthy and Fit

- Be a positive role model by eating a well-balanced diet, keeping active, and maintaining a healthy body image.
- Encourage physical activity by making exercise part of family life. Take walks, ride bikes, go swimming together.
- Make available plenty of nutritious and delicious low-fat foods such as fresh fruits, vegetables, yogurt, pretzels, whole-grain breads and crackers, and popcorn.
- Try to have family meals several nights a week. Everyone can help prepare the meal, which should be simple and nutritious. During these meals, turn off the TV and don't answer the phone.
- Go slow. Have kids try new healthy foods a little at a time, and serve them along with more familiar foods. For example, switch from whole milk to 2%, then 1% over time.
- Serve healthy foods when your kids are hungriest—like veggies and dip when they come home from school or right before dinner.
- Keep mealtime a peaceful and comfortable time for relaxed eating—saving arguments, criticisms and scrutiny for other moments.
- Respect children's feelings of hunger and fullness and allow them to eat according to their own body signals—not making them clean their plates when they are no longer hungry, nor limiting their food intake.
- Give your children the gift of your time, instead of sweets. Show affection with affection and not with food. Giving sweets as a reward may confuse children's understanding of food and love, and may encourage children to seek out food when they are unhappy.
- Encourage children to eat slowly, chew food thoroughly, and enjoy the tastes and textures.
- Limit your child's television viewing. Studies show that the more TV children watch, the more overweight they become. That's because they are less physically active and at the same time are bombarded by ads encouraging them to eat junk food.
- Avoid snacking or eating in front of the TV. People often eat more of the wrong types of foods while engaged in other activities, especially TV. If you do snack, try fruit salad, cut-up veggies, or popcorn with a sprinkling of parmesan cheese or herbs and spices.
- Have fun as a family being physically active! Plan exercise-related activities.

Great Snacks for Healthy, Fit Teens!

Fruit – so many to choose from!
Yogurt, plain or with granola or cut-up fruit
Pretzels or Homemade Popcorn
Nuts, Sunflower or Pumpkin Seeds
A Hard-Boiled Egg
Trail Mix or Dried Fruit
Fruit Juice Popsicles (make your own!)
Cut-up Veggies and Dip
Low-sugar Cereals (dry or with milk)
Sandwiches – Tuna, Turkey, PB & J
English Muffin Pizza
Rice and Beans, Tacos or Burritos
Fruit Smoothies (put fruit juice, yogurt and banana in a blender!)
"Soda Naturale" – 1/2 fruit juice, 1/2 seltzer!

How to Promote Healthy Body Image

DO:

- Help your child develop positive body image. De-emphasize the importance of physical appearance when you describe yourself and others. Try to provide emotional support to children, no matter their size and weight, helping each learn that their self worth depends on who they are on the inside and not what they look like.
- Provide unconditional love and support. Accept that people come in all shapes and sizes and show respect for diversity of body type.
- Remember that an adolescent is still growing and if overweight, should not "diet" but rather work toward improved activity level, eat sensibly and wait until they grow into their weight.
- Discuss any problems or concerns with your child; Listen first, then talk!
- Always consult with a physician regarding weight and growth issues and seek professional help, when needed.
- Limit your children's exposure to magazines and other media that suggest that appearance is a person's most important quality. Discuss the media's stereotypes that "thin is beautiful."
- Notice your own feelings about weight and body image; try not to put your own fears onto your children! Try to feel good about YOU!
- Comment favorably on any positive lifestyle changes your child adopts.

DON'T:

- Turn eating and weight into moral issues.
- Use food as a reward or a punishment.
- Single out an overweight or underweight teenager within a family, school, or social setting by serving "special" foods or imposing restrictions.
- Scold, nag, or discuss the teenager's "difficulties" with other people.
- Negatively comment on a child's weight or appearance. Try to find positive ways to compliment him/her instead, especially emphasizing the non-physical such as special talents, qualities, or values shown.
- Allow children to spend a lot of time in front of the television, computer, or video games.
- Use the scale to measure success in achieving a healthy lifestyle. Avoid weighing altogether!

Fun and Healthy Things To Do With Your Family Instead of Watching TV!

- Plant a garden and take care of it.
- Go for a hike or take a walk.
- Ride your bike or scooter.
- Shoot hoops or play catch.
- Take a yoga or tai chi class, or follow a video.
- Put on music and dance!
- Play a sport such as soccer or basketball.
- Go swimming, sledding, or skating.

—Adapted from *Hunger Pains: The Modern Woman's Tragic Quest for Thinness*, Mary Pipher, Ph.D., Ballantine Books, NY, 1995; and material by WIC Nutritionists, Massachusetts Department of Public Health.

Teens and Dieting

The Challenge:

For teens in today's fast food world, eating healthfully is quite the challenge. The combination of their developing bodies, increasing peer pressure, time commitments, the barrage of media messages promoting "thinness" as the only way to be attractive, plus the thousands of ads for and the availability of fast foods and junk foods, make good nutrition particularly difficult to achieve. Studies show that the more TV a child watches and the more screen time on computers or video games, the more the risk for overweight. That's not surprising since sedentary activities get in the way of more active pursuits, and the barrage of junk food advertisements encourage kids to eat more of the high-fat, high-sugar products advertised.

Whether your child is overweight, underweight, or of average weight, it's important that s/he develop healthy eating and physical activity habits—in order to grow up healthy and fit. The nutritional needs of adolescents are at an all-time high. Teens need increased energy for rapid growth, adequate protein for muscle development, and vitamins and minerals for building bones, blood cells, and normal growth and development. Unfortunately, being overweight, undernourished, and inactive is increasingly the reality for many of the nation's teens.

How to Keep a Healthy Weight:

The best approach to helping young teens maintain a healthy weight is to encourage healthy eating habits together as a family and have fun being physically active together. Health experts recommend that people create a healthy eating and exercise plan they can live with, instead of going "on" a quick weight-loss diet and then going "off" when their willpower wanes. For tips to help raise healthy teens, please refer to the enclosed handouts.

Teen Preoccupation with Dieting:

Both boys and girls are prone to body image concerns and may turn to a host of unhealthy eating practices. Studies show that increasing numbers of younger children are going on "fad" diets, using diet pills, or developing eating disorders in order to get thin at a time when their bodies need nutritious foods to grow and develop naturally. Many teens are drawn to the latest quick weight loss diet or join peers in disordered eating practices, whether they are overweight or not.

Many girls confuse the natural development of hips with "getting fat" or are justifiably upset by their changing bodies when they compare themselves with the unnaturally thin models they see on TV and in magazines. Girls need to understand that while fat stores do increase during puberty, this is part of normal growth and essential for reproductive health. And, growing boys may resort to unhealthy practices in order to gain weight or become more muscular. Helping girls and boys become more comfortable with, and even celebrating their changing bodies, is an important step in helping teens build positive self-esteem. For overweight teens, quick weight-loss diets, rather than balanced eating and exercise, can make matters worse.

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Does My Teen Have a Weight Problem?

Always consult a doctor or health professional to determine whether there is a health concern related to your child's weight. If she or he is found to be overweight or underweight, you may wish to get help from a nutritionist or counselor. If your child is preoccupied with weight, body image, or food issues, we recommend consulting a health care provider or school counselor for professional referrals.

Our #1 Recommendation About Dieting:

Fad or quick weight-loss dieting doesn't work and is harmful, especially for young people who are still growing. We recommend finding a sustainable, balanced approach to eating and physical activity, no matter one's weight. Families that enjoy eating healthfully and being active together have the best chances of maintaining long-lasting healthy habits.

How Fad Dieting Can Do More Harm Than Good:

People that go on quick weight loss diets don't lose weight in a lasting way and studies show that they are more likely to gain excess weight in the long run. The more you diet, the harder it is to lose weight as your body becomes accustomed to lower intakes of food and slows down its metabolic rate.

1. Going on very low calorie diets or skipping meals puts your system into deprivation state. Binge eating food when your willpower wanes is often the body's natural response.
2. Dieting stresses the body and disrupts normal growth and body processes. Extreme dieting can cause health problems and even death from electrolyte imbalance or heart conditions.
3. Without adequate fuel, the body resorts to using its own supplies. Instead of burning fat, it will burn muscle tissue, which is the very thing you want to keep. Burning muscle will also make you tired, depressed, and lethargic. In this state, you're not interested in exercising, which is one of the best ways to keep your body in shape!
4. When a person doesn't give his body the fuel it requires, it will slow down its metabolic rate in order to expend fewer calories. Slowing down your body's rate of burning calories causes your body to gain weight.
5. As a result of not giving your body the food it needs, your body thinks it's in a state of starvation, and will start to crave high-fat, high-calorie foods.
6. By disrupting normal eating, extreme dieters lose a sense of their natural signals for hunger and fullness. This can lead to chaotic eating patterns, and puts dieters at a higher risk for developing eating disorders.
7. Many fad diets often promote the elimination of certain food groups which your body relies on to provide essential nutrients for growing bodies and optimal health.
8. Fad diets are often dependent on specialized foods so that a person can't have a normal social life nor enjoy eating with friends and families, causing further feelings of isolation.
9. Inadequate food intake can lead to chronic health problems such as digestion disorders, osteoporosis or brittle bones, anemia, as well as depression and anxiety.

Top 12 Ways to Keep a Healthy Weight

1. ***Don't go on a very low-calorie diet—DIETS DON'T WORK!***

In fact, frequent dieting when you're young makes it harder to lose weight when you're older. The best way to lose weight or maintain a healthy weight is to increase exercise and cut out empty calorie foods that are rich in sugar and fat. Teens need approximately 1800–2000 calories every day for normal growth, development, and energy needs.

2. ***Eat a balance of foods from MyPyramid.***

That way, you will be giving your body what it needs—fuel for long-lasting energy and nutrients needed for growth, repair, and top performance.

3. ***Don't skip meals, especially breakfast.***

Without adequate fuel for the morning's activities, most people feel tired and irritable—the opposite of energetic! Also, when you are really hungry, you tend to eat more, especially of the foods that are not the healthiest. Skipping meals catches up with you later.

4. ***Bring healthy food along with you.***

Bring along healthy snacks—a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, bagel and low-fat cheese, almonds, fruit, yogurt, pretzels, 100% fruit or vegetable juice, trail mix, or a “veggie grab bag” (a small bag of cut up veggies like baby carrots, cherry tomatoes, peapods, red peppers)—to snack on throughout the day. That way you won't have to rely on whatever is most convenient—which is often high-calorie junk foods and fast foods.

5. ***Make sure to eat at least five fresh fruits and vegetables a day!***

Choose 100% fruit juice like orange juice instead of soda. Grab a fruit or a salad as a snack. Eat cut up, fresh vegetables like broccoli “trees” and carrot sticks with a yogurt dip or light dressing for a TV snack. Microwave or bake a potato and add a dab of yogurt. Add sprouts, lettuce, and tomato to your sandwiches. Fill up half your plate with veggies at dinner time and eat up.

6. ***Enjoy trying new healthy foods.***

Have fun taking a few minutes to make yourself a healthy snack or meal. You may even get interested in exploring healthy cookbooks and experimenting. Or discover new, healthy foods at the supermarket or health food store. Try different ethnic cuisines that emphasize vegetables and whole grains such as Chinese, Japanese, and Mediterranean. In the summer, grow a garden or windowsill sprouts, and eat fresh vegetables each day.

7. ***Be a fat finder.***

Choose lower-fat foods by reading labels and choosing the lower-fat choice. You can eat four apples for the same calories of a fast-food apple pie, or five cups of unbuttered, air-popped popcorn for the same calories as in one serving (1 ounce) of potato chips (15 chips).

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8. Listen to your body signals.

Eat when you're hungry; stop eating when you're full. Sleep when you're tired. Exercise when you're groggy. Breathe deeply when you're stressed. Get involved with fun activities if you're bored. Keep a list close by of all the things you've always wanted to do (such as playing a musical instrument, learning a sport, sewing your jeans, making a photo album, doing an art project). Then, when you get bored, pick something to do from your list other than snacking.

9. Try not to mix eating with other activities, especially TV.

Often you wind up eating more without even being conscious of it. If you have to snack while watching TV, chew on lower-fat foods like plain popcorn, pretzels, fruit salad, or fresh veggies with a light dressing.

10. Never say never—especially to your favorite foods—enjoy them a little at a time.

The minute you deny yourself something you want to eat, you end up spending more time and energy thinking about wanting it. Finally, when you go for it, you often end up eating more than you would have if you had just enjoyed a little of it in the first place. So, moderation is often the best way to go.

11. Have a great time moving your body.

Being active, whether in sports, dancing in your room, or taking a brisk walk, is the best way to feel good, look good, and give your body what it needs. Physical activity is also a great stress reducer and vigorous aerobic exercise increases your metabolic rate and helps your body burn calories more efficiently.

12. Finally, appreciate your body for all that it does for you.

Discover your own unique beauty—inside and out!

For More Information:

- www.foodplay.com
- www.girlshealth.gov
- www.nutritiondata.com
- www.smallstep.gov
- www.teenshealth.org
- *The Right Moves, To Getting Fit and Feeling Great*, Tina Schwager, PTA, ATC, and Michele Schuerger, Free Spirit Publishing Inc., 2007.
- *Weight Loss Confidential*, Anne M. Fletcher, Houghton Mifflin, 2006.