

## TEN HABITS OF HIGHLY HEALTHY KIDS

Proven methods to help you keep your children fit, well, and happy.

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**It's tough to be a kid these days.** Every day, children are bombarded with media messages about body types and food choices. Television programs, video games, movies, magazines, and even comic books present unrealistic ideas about body proportion and diet.

Interspersed with media messages are commercials promoting food that's high in fat and sugar with few vitamins and minerals. Experts estimate the average child sees about 40,000 commercials a year on television. And 80 percent of the food ads children see are for candy, sugary cereals, or fast food.

It's no surprise that during the last two decades, the percentage of overweight children has doubled, and the number of overweight adolescents has tripled. But there are solutions. Here are ten tips to help keep children healthy.

### **1. Promote good food choices**

Keep kid-friendly foods like apples, carrot sticks, low-fat yogurt, and cheese available for snacks. If candy, cookies, chips, or other junk foods are readily available, don't be surprised when children eat them. Toddlers and school-aged children need three meals a day, with two or three snacks. Try to schedule these at regular times and avoid "grazing," where the child eats on an ongoing basis throughout the day.

### **2. Educate kids about media influences**

It's impossible to shut out all negative media influences. Instead, teach kids to be smart media consumers. Help kids understand that advertising is designed to make them want something—whether they need it or not. Teach them to appreciate their own bodies and not compare themselves to others.

### **3. Limit fast food**

For many families with working parents, limited time, and tight budgets fast food is a regular part of life. Limit fast food as much as possible. If you eat fast food, choose healthy options, like salads, fruit, and milk. And go for the kid's meal, which has appropriate portion sizes.

#### **4. Eat together as a family**

Research shows children who eat meals with their families are less likely to use cigarettes, alcohol, or drugs. They also do better in school. Family meals also help kids eat nutritious foods, like fruits, vegetables, lean meats, low-fat dairy, and whole grains.

#### **5. Take responsibility and give your children nutritious choices**

Parents are responsible for planning meals that are nutritionally well-balanced. Children are responsible for choosing what parts and how much of the meal they will eat. Give children several nutritious options in each meal.

#### **6. Limit screen time**

Turn the television off during mealtime. In fact, limit “screen time” the amount of time the child spends in front of a television, computer, video game, or other screen—to no more than two hours a day. Computer time can be expanded if spent doing homework.

#### **7. Say no to soda**

Soft drinks, fruit drinks, and sports drinks, which today often come in 20-ounce servings, are laden with sugar. Avoid them. Have children drink milk or water with meals. Limit consumption of 100-percent fruit juice to six ounces a day.

#### **8. Don't give up**

Try not to use foods as a bribe or reward. Food should be a source of nutrition and enjoyment but not a motivator for certain behaviors. If a child says he or she doesn't like a certain type of food, don't give up. Children may have to be exposed to certain foods twenty to thirty times before they'll accept them. Offer the food matter-of-factly. Place the food on the table and let the children decide if they want to try it.

#### **9. Stay active**

Promote an active lifestyle for your entire family. Engage in activities that move your body every day. Make activities fun: bike, swim, dance, hike, or just play as a family.

#### **10. Be a role model**

If you eat well and are active every day, your child will probably act in a similar way. Children of overweight parents are three times more likely to be overweight themselves. Remember that one of the strongest motivators for children is their parents' example.