

Help Your Whole Family Be Healthy and Fit

Our country is in the middle of an epidemic. Many young children weigh too much for their height and age. Almost 16% of children ages 2 to 5 are overweight. These children are at risk for illnesses once found only in adults, such as Type 2 diabetes and high blood pressure. Because they get out of breath easily, they don't enjoy physical play. This robs them of many of the pleasures of being a child.

What can parents do? Here are some suggestions.

Follow the nutrition guidelines for children under 6. Information on nutritious foods, portion sizes, and sample menus for planning snacks and meals are available free at www.mypyramid.gov/index.html.

Eat meals together. That way you'll know what your child is eating, and you can model appropriate choices and portion sizes. And you will have fun talking and spending time as a family.

Steer your child toward healthier choices at fast food restaurants. Look for salads, sliced apples, baby carrots, and low-fat milk in colorful containers that are attractive to children.

Offer fun, healthy snacks. Ants on a log (a celery stick filled with peanut butter or cream cheese and topped with raisins), sliced fresh fruit on a skewer, or raw vegetables and a low-fat yogurt dip are favorites of many preschoolers.

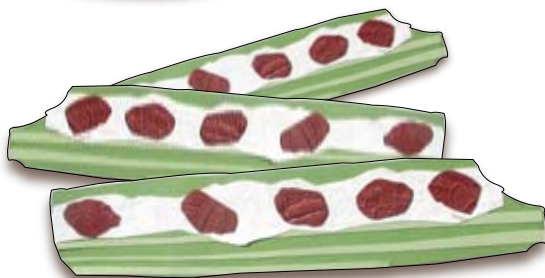
Teach your child to listen to his or her stomach. When children do this, they'll learn to know when they have had enough to eat. It takes 15 to 20 minutes after eating to know if you're really hungry for seconds.

Plan a taste-testing event. Family members can taste and vote on new, healthy foods—veggie burgers, baby spinach, turkey hot dogs, whole wheat pasta, kiwis, and the like. Then make the favorites part of your regular menu.

Give hugs and kisses—not food—for comfort and encouragement.

Limit your children's screen time. Instead of watching television or playing on the computer, spend time together—go for a run, kick a ball around, ride bikes (or trikes), or take a nature hike.

Walk instead of driving to nearby places. Leave the stroller at home. Park a few blocks from the store and walk the rest of the way. Get off the bus a stop or two away from your destination and walk the remainder.



A message from your child's teacher
