But let's face it, today many children are heavier than they should be and, therefore, are facing serious health consequences that could last a lifetime. Compared with a child who is not overweight, an overweight child is much more likely to become an overweight adult.

As a parent, you have the greatest influence on your child’s diet and exercise habits and, whether you realize it, are daily making decisions that will affect your child’s current and future nutrition and health patterns.

Part of your responsibility as a parent is to teach your children how to lead healthy lives now and when they are adults. The best time to start teaching these lessons to children is when they’re young, before unhealthy choices become bad habits.

The advice on healthy habits and the proven tips contained in this brochure will help you to talk to your children about diet, nutrition, and physical activity.
The following are 10 physician-approved tips for parents:

1. Discuss the importance of healthy diet and lifestyle choices with your child. Remember to talk about health, not about weight.

2. Create a healthy eating plan; do not put your child on a diet. Many diets that are popular with adults have never been tested on children, and a healthy, balanced diet is the goal for children.

3. Allow sweets or treats, such as candy and other snacks, in moderation rather than eliminate them. Children who learn the importance of balanced eating will be better-equipped to manage their own diet as adults.

4. Give your child plenty of healthy alternatives. Focusing only on what he or she cannot eat does not teach your child to make healthy choices.

5. Do not use food as leverage in a relationship. Do not hold back food as a punishment, and do not offer food as a reward.

6. Encourage your child to make better food choices. Communicating your interest in his or her health is more effective than focusing on shortcomings.

7. Have your child sit down, eat a balanced meal, and then move on to a fun activity. Do not let your child eat in his or her bedroom or in front of the television, constantly leaving and returning to the table.

8. Practice what you preach. If you eat right, it will be easier to get your child to eat right as well.


10. Promote better nutrition by having regular meal and snack times. Restrict all-day snacking.
Your Actions Can Make a Huge Difference

Raising children is hard work, and sometimes, parents think that their children just do not listen. There is a lot of evidence to the contrary. They will listen to health advice.

A University of North Carolina study found that although children do not want their parents to talk to them about how to dress or the kind of music to listen to, 80 percent say that they actually want their parents to talk to them about health.

**GETTING STARTED.** Deciding to become more active in promoting healthy eating and lifestyle habits for your children is a decision you will never regret. A great way to start is by talking to your doctor and to your family.

Your doctor can tell you whether your child weighs too much. By using tools, such as growth charts for children, your doctor can determine whether you should be concerned. Your doctor can then work with you to create a solution.

Once you have developed a plan, sit down with your family and explain that you will be making some important changes in family meals and that eating will be different — but fun. Remember that this is not just your child’s issue; it’s your family’s issue as well. Aim for a healthy balance of foods for everyone.

One of the best things you can do on a regular basis is to sit down as a family during meals. This promotes family unity and gives everyone an opportunity to connect with one another.

Remember that children like to have fun. Introduce a variety of new foods and dishes to your family.
Since most drastic changes in diets for adults are rarely sustainable and most people who lose weight on a diet gain all the weight back, these diet strategies are rarely effective among children.

If your child asks you about going on a diet, talk to your doctor. If your doctor says that your child is overweight, encourage a modest diet change without restricting the total amount of calories your child eats. Again, provide a healthy and balanced diet that includes all kinds of foods. In severe cases of obesity, medical professionals should supervise diets.

A FEW MYTHS ABOUT SWEETS. Many parents worry needlessly when their children eat sweets. While eating too much sugar can contribute to obesity, moderate amounts can be included in a healthy diet. Eating any food in moderation is healthy. Eating too much of any food is unhealthy.

Forbidding any food only increases a child’s fascination with that food. Depriving your child of anything will only make him or her want it even more. If your child wants a piece of candy, allow a piece but set limits on how much more he or she can have.
According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, children need 60 minutes of physical activity every day, because:

- Physical activity strengthens muscles, bones, and joints.
- Physical activity results in self-confidence and well-being.
- Physical activity is a fun alternative to harmful behavior, like experimenting with drugs and alcohol.

We need to be aware that the youth of today have many choices. Below are some tips that will help get your children moving:

- Be a role model by being active yourself.
- Celebrate special occasions with fun activities, like swimming or roller skating.
- Add physical activity to weekend or vacation plans, such as hiking, biking, or taking long walks.
- Make sure that your child (and you) walk as often as possible. It’s a great exercise that almost everyone can do.
- Have your child march in place, dance, or stretch during TV commercials.

There is no question that kids need physical activity.
The following are some great resources for more information on healthy diets and physical activities:

www.aafp.org — Advice from the American Academy of Family Physicians on family health.

www.kidnetic.com — This online resource offers tips for children between the ages of 9 and 12 and for their families, inspiring them to practice healthier lifestyles.

www.americanheart.org — Great tips for raising healthy children.

www.shapeup.org — Information about healthy weight management through better nutrition and increased physical activity.

www.verbparents.com — Ideas from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on how to increase the physical-activity levels of your children.

*The ABCs of Feeding School-Age Children.* Available from the American Dietetic Association ([www.eatright.org](http://www.eatright.org)).

*Dining With the Dinosaurs.* A coloring/activity book featuring food dinosaurs that teach children about the USDA food guidance system. Check your public library for availability.

www.naspeinfo.org — The National Association for Sport and Physical Education supports and advocates for quality physical education, physical activity, and sport programs in schools and communities across the U.S.
THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF FAMILY PHYSICIANS FOUNDATION HAS
FAVORABLE REVIEW MEANS THAT MEDICAL INFORMATION IS ACCURATE,
BUT DOES NOT IMPLY ENDORSEMENT OF ANY CONCLUSIONS PRESENTED.

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