

31

Days to Healthier Kids

October is Family Health Month—a time to take a look at the health and lifestyle habits of everyone in your household. Use these 31 daily tips to help your kids develop healthy nutrition and fitness habits for years to come!



October

1 **Maintain an upbeat attitude. Healthy habits should be fun. If you're having a good time, your kids will also look forward to nutrition and fitness instead of dreading it.**

2 **Make family exercise a priority.** Provide clean workout attire and reliable transportation to and from activities that keep them active, like a YMCA basketball league or pick-up game of soccer.

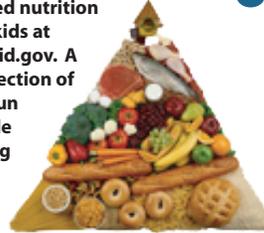
3 **Feed them breakfast.** Studies show that breakfast-eating children learn and perform better in school. Try a quick smoothie with soy milk, frozen bananas and peanut butter.

4 **Watch your child's weight. Sometimes it's difficult for parents to recognize whether their own child has a weight problem. At well-child check ups, discuss weight issues with your child's pediatrician.**



5 **Provide access to fitness.** Buy some small pieces of equipment to keep around the house. Encourage your kids to exercise during TV commercials, and stretch before bed each night.

6 **Follow the food pyramid. Get personalized nutrition plans for your kids at www.MyPyramid.gov. A child-friendly section of the site offers fun games, printable posters, coloring pages and worksheets.**



7 **Explain body changes.** Let your kids know that it's normal to experience an increase in body fat during puberty and throughout life. Teach them that this increase has a biological purpose.

8 **Exercise with your kids.** If your kids are old enough, you can bike, run, walk, hike or rollerblade together. Start a routine and stick with it.



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Post healthy facts. Hang up articles and resources about health and fitness on a bulletin board or family fridge for everyone to see.

10 **Work in the yard.** Gardening and other yard work provides an opportunity for families to spend time together, enjoy the outdoors, beautify their home, and get active. Try a small vegetable garden too!

11 **Don't skip fruits and vegetables.** Many kids are partial to fruits, but vegetables are important too. Include their favorites, along with dips and dressings to make them more palatable for picky eaters.

12 **Educate about body shape.** Explain that every person has a unique body type, and that complete control is not possible. Body shape is a lot like height—there's not much they can do to change it.

13 **Suggest walking more than driving.** If you have errands to run, and your destination is within two miles from home, walk or bike with the kids to get there. Enjoy the great outdoors and slower pace.

14 **Allow periodic splurges.** Forbidding goodies entirely is almost guaranteed to send your kids straight to the vending machines at school. Allow the occasional treat, as long as they're eating healthy most of the time.

15 **Use positive language all the time.** Positive words can turn into positive actions! Frame healthy habits as good and exciting so your child will view them similarly.

16 **Encourage active video games.** Fitness-related games like Dance Dance Revolution, Nintendo Wii, or Eye Toy make good choices.

17 **Limit sugary drinks.** Water, low-fat milk and 100% fruit juices are better choices than soda and other sugary beverages.



18 **Designate a family fitness night. Try a new active pursuit each week. Whether it's swimming, rollerblading, Frisbee golf, or two-on-two basketball, you're guaranteed to have fun!**

19 **Appreciate body diversity.** Help them recognize the wide variety of body shapes and sizes. Athletes like swimmers, runners and jockeys all have different strengths thanks to their body shapes.

20 **Establish a bedtime routine.** Toddlers and kids need more sleep than adults—about 8 to 12 hours, depending on age. Get them to bed early so they'll be healthier, stronger, and better able to concentrate.



21 **Eat together. When children eat with their families, they tend to do better in school, avoid risky behaviors, develop higher self-esteem and eat more nutritiously! Sit down together at least three times a week.**

22 **Get outside!** For a fun family activity that keeps everyone in shape, try hiking. Or, create a fitness course in the backyard, complete with jump rope, jumping jacks, and pushup stations.

23 **Give praise!** Healthy changes require acclaim! Celebrate good food choices, fitness improvements, and more with positive reinforcement.

24 **Pack a healthy lunch.** Many school cafeteria meals are high in saturated fat and cholesterol and too low in fiber- and nutrient-rich fruits, vegetables and whole grains.

25 **Turn off the TV.** TV is bad for kids, according to scores of doctors and researchers. Limit TV time and encourage active pursuits instead.

26 **Promote sports.** Team sports teach kids more than fitness—they improve motor skills, increase self-esteem, and foster cooperation and teamwork. Even non-competitive activities like dancing count.

27 **Model respect.** Show appreciation of your own body type so your kids appreciate theirs. Don't let your kids overhear you complain about your thighs or lament about how much you overate.

28 **Follow the 80/20 rule.** Provide healthy food choices at home so that your kids are eating well about 80% of the time. Allot the other 20% of the time for fun foods.

29 **Consider unconventional activities. Skateboarding, snowboarding, Tai chi and other physical pursuits might be just the thing to get your child involved in exercise.**



30 **Be an advocate.** Not every family has access to the health information that you do, and only through advocacy and support can other people benefit from your knowledge and skills. Get involved to help others!



31 **Lead by example. This may be the most effective way to teach anyone anything. Explain why you choose to order the garden burger and why you work out. Kids are sponges for knowledge!**