

# 7 tips to help you and your kids lead healthy lives

---

## Rethink your drink

- **Serve water at home and in child care settings**
- **Limit fundraising sales of sugar-sweetened beverages to children**

Reconsider serving sugar-sweetened beverages to children. Even fruit juice or fitness drinks have more sugar than most children need. Consider that a one cup serving of apple juice has 110 calories. If your child has a cup with every meal, she's taking in 330 calories, just from juice. That's like eating a big piece of birthday cake every day.

Instead, serve water or low-fat or skim milk. Not only will this help your child maintain a healthy weight, but swapping water for juice saves money, too. If your child is a regular juice drinker, he may not like the switch at first. But stick with it, and in a few days he'll forget the juice.

## Turn off the TV and computer

- **Limit children's screen time to two hours per day**

If the TV is the first thing you turn on in the morning and the last thing you turn off at night, you and your family are at risk of being obese. In fact, a recent analysis of research on kids and the media found:<sup>1</sup>

- A strong relationship between increased media exposure (such as watching TV or playing computer games) and an increase in childhood obesity.
- More hours of media predicted increased weight over time.
- Those children who spent more than eight hours watching TV per week at age three were significantly more likely to be obese at age seven.

Not only are children usually inactive while they watch TV, but they are exposed to advertising to persuade them to consume more unhealthy food. Children ages 8-12 see an average of 21 advertisements for food on TV each day, and the majority of those are for candy, fast food, and breakfast cereal.<sup>2</sup>

As a parent or caregiver, what can you do? It's simple: turn off the TV or the computer. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends no more than two hours of screen time per day for children. The silence your child experiences may at first cause him to say, "Mom, I'm bored." But give him time to let that boredom transition to creativity, and you'll find he won't just be healthier but more imaginative.

## Move more every day

- **Walk or bike places rather than drive**
- **Park farther from your destination**
- **Enroll kids in physical activity programs such as team sports**
- **Use physical activity for entertainment (time on a playground, in yard or gym) rather than TV or DVDs**

We know that exercise helps us stay healthy and lose weight. But this doesn't mean our children have to jog or play a team sport. Simply playing in the backyard or at the park is exercise for children. Too, there are ways adults can help build movement into a child's day. Investigate whether your kids can walk or bike to school; visit [www.saferoutesinfo.org](http://www.saferoutesinfo.org) on how to make the trip more safe. When you visit a mall or shopping center, park farther from the door to get the whole family moving. Team sports can help build supervised activity into your child's day. And, again, turn off the TV – the extra time your child will have will give her time to be active.

## Eat more healthy meals at home

- Plan ahead at grocery store for healthy and easy to prepare meals, such as precooked chicken breast strips, pre-cut apple slices, frozen vegetable steamers, and prepared salads with lowfat dressing.
- When eating at fast-food or sit-down restaurants, examine the menu for healthy choices; most restaurants now offer healthy options and smaller portions.
- Order milk or water rather than soft drinks or juice and salads or fruit rather than French fries

Families are busier than ever, and it is easy for parents and carpoolers to swing through a fast-food window to pick up a quick dinner. But this can negatively impact a child's health:

- Frequently eating foods prepared away from home is associated with obesity, higher body fat and a higher BMI.
- Women who eat foods prepared outside the home more than five times per week consume about 290 more calories on average each day than women who eat these foods less often.
- Eating more fast-food meals is linked to eating more calories, more saturated fat, fewer fruits and vegetables, and less milk.<sup>3</sup>

Eating at home rather than dining out may seem to be more costly and time consuming, but the cumulative time spent in travels to and through fast food restaurants and the cumulative money spent on restaurant meals often exceeds that of a once a week session of meal planning and a trip to the grocery store.

## Watch your portion size

- Monitor portions served to children
- Limit sales of large-sized snack foods to children

Children do need to eat to support their growing bodies, but they do not need portions equivalent to adults. And even adults fall prey to food marketing that tells us to "supersize" our portions, tipping the scales on our daily nutritional needs. You can visit [www.mypyramid.gov](http://www.mypyramid.gov) to see a customized nutritional needs pyramid chart for your child based on his age and activity level.

## Eat more fruits and vegetables

- Always seek opportunities to raise children's fruit and vegetable consumption
- Whenever possible, serve fruits or veggies as a snack
- Constantly expose children to fresh fruits and vegetables of a wide variety

You're in a hurry and your child wants a quick snack after school. Or you need to serve a snack to fifteen hungry preschoolers at Sunday School. Do you reach for butter cookies or baby carrots?

Adults can positively impact children's health by always seeking ways to increase their consumption of fruits and vegetables. Prepackaged cut and washed apples, carrots, and celery sticks are a big help for easy snacks. And vegetables and fruit can be cost-effective, too, when you consider the price of individually packaged cookies, crackers and fruit chews or juice boxes that many parents and caregivers opt for.

Many parents avoid serving their children fruits and vegetables because they don't want to fight with their kids about food. But research shows that when kids are exposed to a new food and they see their parents enjoying that food, they are more likely to try the food, too. You don't need to bribe, coerce, or threaten your children; simply place new foods on their plate and over time your child is likely to give them a try.

---

<sup>1</sup> Common Sense Media, "Media + Child and Adolescent Health: A Systematic Review." November 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Kaiser Family Foundation, "Food for Thought: Television Food Advertising to Children in the United States." March 2007.

<sup>3</sup> Keystone Center, "The Keystone Forum on Away-From-Home Foods: Opportunities for Preventing Weight Gain and Obesity." May 2006.