



Tips to Support Healthy Routines for Children and Teens

KEY POINTS

Healthy habits are the building blocks of lifelong well-being for children and teens. Parents, guardians, and teachers can help children and teens develop healthy habits.



Why it matters

Healthy eating and physical activity are important for growth and development and prevention of chronic health conditions. They can also help boost students' academic performance. For good mental and physical health, kids also need plenty of sleep and limited screen time.

Parents, guardians, and teachers can help children and teens develop healthy habits with these tips.

Make sure they get enough sleep

Children and teens need more sleep than adults, and the amount varies by age. Too little [sleep](#) is associated with obesity, partly because inadequate sleep may make us eat more and be less physically active. See the recommended [amounts of sleep](#) by age and suggested habits to improve sleep.

Reduce their screen time

In young people, too much screen time is associated with poor sleep, weight gain, [lower grades in school](#), and poor mental health. Reducing screen time can help free time for other activities and improve sleep. Cutting back on screen time also limits cues to eat unhealthy food. See [Screen Time Vs Lean Time](#).

Limit the time children and teens watch television, play video games, or use a smartphone or tablet. Instead, encourage children and teens to do fun activities with their friends and family members. Or encourage them to move more in their independent activities.

Help them develop healthy habits

To help children and teens develop healthy eating habits:

- Provide plenty of vegetables, fruits, and whole-grain products.
- Choose lean meats, poultry, fish, lentils, and beans for protein.
- Include low-fat or non-fat milk or dairy products, such as cheese and yogurt.
- Encourage your family to drink water instead of sugary drinks.

Additionally, you can:

- Encourage kids to eat a healthy breakfast and lunch whether at home or at school.
- Review school menus with your kids and encourage them to try new foods.
- Model healthy eating at home.

Remember that small changes every day can lead to success!

See Also:

[Choose My Plate for Children](#)

Limit salt, added sugar, and saturated fat

Limiting foods with high amounts of [saturated fat](#), [added sugar](#), and [salt](#) can help support healthy eating habits. If these foods are eaten less often, they will truly be treats! For everyday snacks, try these easy-to-prepare options.

- 1 cup carrots, broccoli, or bell peppers with 2 tablespoons hummus.
- A medium apple or banana with 1 tablespoon peanut butter.
- 1 cup blueberries or grapes with 1/2 cup plain, low-fat yogurt.
- 1/4 cup of tuna wrapped in a lettuce leaf.

Help children and teens stay active

In addition to being fun, regular physical activity has [many health benefits](#), including:

- Strengthening bones and muscles.
- Decreasing blood pressure.
- Reducing risk of several chronic diseases, including type 2 diabetes and obesity.
- Reducing risk of depression.
- Boosting academic performance by improving attention and memory.
- Helping regulate body weight and reduce body fat.

Children 3 to 5 should be active throughout the day. Children and adolescents 6 to 17 should be physically active at least 60 minutes each day. They need aerobic activity, which is anything that makes their heart beat faster. They also need bone-strengthening activities such as running or jumping and muscle-strengthening activities such as climbing or push-ups. [See details](#).

To help children and teens get enough physical activity:

- Make physical activity part of your family's daily routine by taking walks or playing active games together.
- Help children and teens find fun activities to do on their own or with friends and family, such as walking or riding bikes.
- Take young people to places where they can be active, such as public parks or playgrounds, community baseball fields, or community basketball courts.
- Encourage your child to participate in school or community physical activity or sports programs.

Remember that children imitate adults. Start adding physical activity to your own routine and encourage your child to join you.

Learn more

Healthy eating

- [Benefits of Healthy Eating for Children](#)
- [Healthy Eating Tips](#) – Choosing healthy foods and drinks.
- [Good Nutrition Starts Early](#) – How to include a variety of fruits and vegetables in your child's diet.
- [MyPlate Kids](#) – Includes games, activity sheets, videos, and songs.
- [Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020-2025](#)

Physical activity

- [Health Benefits of Physical Activity for Children](#)
- [Physical Activity for Everyone](#) – Recommendations by age.
- [Tips for Getting More Active Minutes](#) – Ways to find more time for physical activity.
- [Best Bones Forever!](#) – Children learn why calcium, vitamin D, and bone-strengthening activity are essential.
- [Benefits of School-Based Physical Activity](#) – How physical activity can benefit a student's health, teachers, and the community.

Social and emotional wellness

- [BAM! Body and Mind](#) – Classroom resources for teachers of grades 4 through 8.
- [Give Your Kids a Healthy Body and Mind This Summer](#) – Learn ways to support your child's physical and emotional well-being.
- [Parents for Healthy Schools](#) – Resources to encourage parent involvement in school health.

Maintaining a healthy weight

- [Preventing Childhood Obesity](#) – Things you can do at home.
- [Child and Teen BMI \(Body Mass Index\) Calculator](#) – BMI screens for obesity but is not a diagnostic tool. See more [about BMI](#) for children and teens.
- [We Can!](#) – National education program designed for adults to help children 8 to 13 stay at a healthy weight.

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Healthy Weight and Growth

Eating well and being physically active contribute to healthy growth in childhood and good health throughout life. See how to get started.

- [About Healthy Weight and Growth](#)
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