

Healthy Kids



Right now, America's children need a helping hand with their health—especially when it comes to being physically fit. In 2004, about 9 million (or roughly one in six kids ages six to 19 years old) were overweight. That's more than triple the number of overweight children in 1980!¹

The rate of childhood obesity is growing dramatically. And many children spend their free time watching television and playing video games instead of doing something physically active like riding a bike or playing sports. As a result, chronic conditions, such as diabetes and heart disease, are showing up more frequently and at earlier ages. According to the American Diabetes Association:

- One in three children born in the U.S. in 2000 will develop diabetes over the course of their lifetime.
- Today's kids may actually have a lower average life expectancy than their parents have because of the increase in diabetes cases among people in their age group.

How can we keep kids healthy?

The good news is that you can do a lot to help. Here are some things you may want to focus on to help your children have a healthier and more active life today—and tomorrow.

1. Talk to your kids about health

Sometimes it may seem like your kids don't want to listen to you, but when it comes to information about health, they are looking to you for help.

- In a survey of more than 1,000 kids ages nine to 13, when kids were asked who they'd turn to if they had an important health question, their No. 1 response was their parents.²

Kids also want knowledge about how they can be healthier—and stay healthy throughout their lives. In the same survey, almost 80% of kids said they are “very interested” or “sort of interested” in learning about health. So, take a moment to sit down with

your kids and ask them about their health questions and concerns. Share with them what you know about how they can be healthy.

2. Don't forget to discuss emotions

Good health is not only about the body; it is also about the mind. Adults aren't the only people who get sad, angry, or who worry. Kids do, too. The top concerns for kids include grades, their looks or appearance, being out of shape or overweight, problems at home, and fitting in at school, according to a survey of more than 1,000 kids ages nine to 13.³

Sometimes kids are unhappy or stressed out about something but don't feel comfortable—or don't know how to—express their feelings in words. Let them know that you are there to help, no matter what.

3. Live healthy: Be a role model for your kids

Everything you do affects the habits your kids develop—from the vocabulary you use, to the way you dress, to the foods you buy, to the examples you set with your own eating habits and physical activity.

- Keep nutritious foods in your cabinets, and serve healthy meals for the family.
- Make sure that you incorporate physical activity into your daily routine, and get your kids involved. Take a family walk in the morning before work or school or in the evening after you've all had dinner.

4. Break up the couch potato parties: Encourage kids to be active

Every day, the average American child age eight to 18 spends:

- Nearly four hours watching TV, videos, DVDs, and prerecorded shows.
- Just over one hour on the computer.
- About 50 minutes playing video games.⁴

That means that the average American child devotes more than one day out of the whole week to “couch potato” activities.

Here are some ideas for how you can help your kids turn off the TV:

- Kids whose parents watch a lot of TV also watch a lot of TV. If you want your kids to be active, you should be active, too.
- Set limits on the amount of time they watch— one or two hours a day, at the most.
- Let kids earn their “couch potato” time by doing something active first.

Here are some ideas for active things kids can do to work up a good sweat:

- Jump rope
- Ride a bike
- Do sprints (short running races) and time them
- Play tag, catch, Frisbee, or hide-and-go-seek
- Go for a hike or walk around the neighborhood
- Get a group together and play a game. How about basketball, soccer, or wiffleball?
- Take dance classes (jazz, tap, ballet)

5. Get appropriate medical care for your kids

It is important that your kids get medical care when they need it and that they get good preventive medical care. The U.S. Surgeon General suggests that parents get their children vaccinated against preventable childhood illnesses and talk with their child’s primary health provider about keeping up to date on all vaccinations.

Before you visit the doctor

Here are some things you might want to do before you and your child visit the doctor:

- Try to establish a relationship with one doctor (a primary care physician) to take care of your child’s health. Ask for recommendations from people you trust.
- Keep a list of questions you have about your child’s health as they come up. Be sure to bring this list along with you when you visit the doctor.
- Keep track of any unusual symptoms, behaviors, or health-related issues that you’ve noticed in your child and related factors.

At the doctor’s office

To make your visits to the doctor as valuable as possible, you should:

- Share your child’s health history and any health problems that run in your family.

- Ask about your child’s current health.
- Ask what you should be doing to make sure your child stays as healthy as possible.
- Ask questions if you don’t understand something.

After your visit

Follow up with your doctor or health care provider’s office if you haven’t heard back about test results or if you have questions about medication or another part of your child’s health and treatment.

To help keep track of your child’s health, make a list of:

- All of your child’s visits to the doctor and the reason for the visit.
- A list of the vaccinations he or she has received and when. (Your child may need this for school, travel, or even to participate in sports or other activities.)
- Information about any medications he or she is taking or has taken.
- A list of any known medication or food allergies.

What if I can’t afford medical care for my child?

If you don’t have insurance and have trouble paying for your child’s medicine, you may be able to get help.

The Partnership for Prescription Assistance is a program developed by America’s pharmaceutical companies that helps people who can’t afford their medicines get help through the public or private assistance program that’s right for them. Call 1-888-4PPA-NOW or visit www.PPARx.org to see if you may qualify for help. The Partnership for Prescription Assistance also has a list of health clinics in your community that may be able to provide assistance on its Web site (www.PPARx.org).

1 The Centers for Disease Control. Overweight and Obesity Home Page. Available at: <http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/obesity/>

2 Kids Health Poll. January 2005. Available at: http://kidshealth.org/kid/stay_healthy/body/poll_health_literacy.html.

3 Kids Health Poll. January 2005. Available at: http://kidshealth.org/kid/feeling/emotion/poll_worry.html

4 Henry J. Kaiser Foundation’s survey, “Generation M: Media in the Lives of 8-18 Year Olds,” March 2005.