
Healthy and Active Kids and Teens



Many young people struggle with excess weight. Nearly one in three children ages 5 to 11 are considered to be overweight or obese. Carrying excess weight increases the chances that young people may develop certain health problems.

As a parent or other caregiver, you can do a lot to help your child reach and maintain a healthy weight. It is important for your child to practice healthy eating and physical activity habits from an early age. You can take an active role to help your child — and your whole family — learn healthy habits that last a lifetime.

Why should we care about our weight?

Excess weight and obesity are linked to a number of health problems, including diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, sleep apnea and even cancer. Not only can being overweight impact your child's health, it can also affect his or her emotional well-being. Children who carry excess weight may experience low self-esteem, negative body image, depression and bullying.

The good news is that you have the power to take control of your family's health and weight-loss goals.

What causes childhood overweight and obesity?

There are many factors that contribute to overweight and obesity. Here are a few:

Eating patterns: To reach and maintain a healthy weight, you should eat well-balanced meals that are rich in fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, lean meats and low in fat, sugar and sodium.

Physical activity levels: The CDC recommends that children and teens get at least an hour of physical activity each day.

Media: More time spent indoors playing video games and watching television means less time being physically active. Encourage your child to get up and move more each day.

Genetics: Children with a family history of obesity and obesity-related problems like high blood pressure, stroke and diabetes may be more at risk.

Parents can control many of these factors: eating habits, physical activity and media. Others, like genetics, may be more difficult to overcome. It is important to recognize which factors play a role in your child's health early on, so you can avoid allowing your child to fall into poor habits. Making sure your child is getting plenty of exercise, setting regular eating times and monitoring your child's stress levels and sleep patterns are some ways to help your child avoid putting on extra weight.

What is a “healthy weight”?

One way to determine a person’s weight status is to calculate his or her body mass index (BMI). The BMI measures a person’s weight in relation to his or her height. The BMI of children is age- and sex-specific and is known as the “BMI-for-age.” BMI-for-age uses growth charts created by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The CDC is an independent agency that provides health information on behalf

of your health plan. Since boys and girls experience weight and height changes rapidly during their teenage years, there are special growth charts for different age ranges. BMI is expressed as a percentile for children and teens and can be calculated using a Child and Teen BMI Calculator located on the CDC’s website. The chart shows BMI-for-age weight status categories and the corresponding percentiles.

www.cdc.gov/healthyweight/assessing/bmi/childrens_bmi/about_childrens_bmi.html

Percentile Range	Weight Status Category
Less than the 5th percentile	Underweight
5th to 84th percentile	Normal or Healthy Weight
85th to 94th percentile	Overweight
95th percentile or greater	Obese

If you’re not sure about your child’s weight status, consult with his or her pediatrician.

The role of the parent

Parents play a key role in modeling healthy behaviors. To establish a positive body image early on, it is best for parents to focus on improving their child’s overall health, not specifically on his or her weight. Parents should encourage healthy lifestyle changes and discourage dieting unless otherwise directed by their child’s pediatrician. Stay alert for eating disorders. Encourage, praise and support your child. It is also important

to show your child that you love him or her, regardless of weight.

If you are worried about your child’s weight, talk to your child’s health care provider. You can also contact one of our health coaches. Our coaches are caring, compassionate and trained in motivation. We care about you and want to help you and your family reach your health goals.

Partner with your child's pediatrician

Talk with your child's pediatrician about BMI, lifestyle habits and health goals. It's important for children to learn healthy eating and physical activity habits at a young age. Parents and caregivers have a unique opportunity to instill healthy habits in their children. To help your child develop healthy habits, practice what you preach by being a positive role model. Children are good learners, and they often mimic what they see. Choose healthy foods and active pastimes for yourself.

What can my family and I do to encourage a healthy weight?

A healthy weight is a combination of healthy eating and physical activity — energy in versus energy out. When putting energy (food or calories) into your body, you want to make sure to choose healthy options in healthy quantities. Portion control is extremely important when trying to lose weight. So, what is the difference between a serving size and a portion? A portion

is the amount of food you choose to eat for a meal or snack. It can be large or small — you decide. A serving is a measured amount of food or drink, such as one slice of bread or one eight-ounce glass of milk. You must be careful that the portion you choose is not equal to multiple servings. Larger portions of food generally lead to increased calories and weight gain.

www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/educational/wecan/eat-right/distortion.htm



Energy out: physical activity and screen time

The benefits of physical activity are endless. Physical activity helps to:

- Improve sleep
- Improve mood
- Build strong bones
- Gain endurance
- Increase energy
- Strengthen muscles
- Relieve stress
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Promote self esteem

What counts as physical activity, and how much should we get?

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) recommends that children and teens be physically active for at least 60 minutes on most, if not all, days. HHS is an independent agency that provides health information on behalf of your health plan. The guidelines recommend that adults get a minimum of two hours and 30 minutes a week, or 30 minutes five days a week, of moderate-intensity aerobic activity.

Examples of physical activity for yourself or your child include: jumping rope, playing hopscotch, dancing, jogging, swimming, playing sports, playing tag, hula hooping and jumping jacks. The point is to engage your child in a fun activity that increases his or her heart rate for an hour every day.

www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/educational/wecan/get-active/index.htm

Turn off the technology

Computer and video games are extremely popular, and children can sit in front of a TV screen for hours on end. Be sure to limit your child's screen time and encourage activities that require movement and active play time. Most children are already sitting for hours during the day, whether at school, doing homework or watching television. Try to counteract some of those sedentary hours with active ones at home.

How can my family work on maintaining a healthy weight for life?

Focus on making slow, steady progress over time. Don't try to make a lot of big changes all at once. Set small, incremental goals as a family. Set short-term and long-term goals. Track your progress using a food and activity log and a goal calendar. Cook

and eat more meals together at home. Research shows that families who eat more home-cooked meals together are more likely to maintain a healthy weight. Make it a family affair! Cook together, and do physical activity together as a family.

www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/educational/wecan/healthy-weight-basics/maintain.htm

Other healthy habits.

- Your child should get at least nine hours of sleep per night.
 - Don't allow TVs, video games or computers in your child's room.
 - Limit sugary drinks.
 - Take your child to his or her pediatrician for regular checkups.
 - Take your child for regular dental and vision checkups.
 - Apply sunscreen when playing outdoors.
 - Wear helmets and safety gear when riding bikes or skating.
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The body gets energy from three main sources: carbohydrates, fats and protein. Each of these is essential for our bodies to work properly. As you start to change your eating habits, you need to learn the role of these nutrients in your body and how much of them you should eat each day.

Food Group	Servings Per Day	Portion Size for Ages 1 to 3	Portion Size for Ages 4 to 6	Portion Size for Ages 7 to 10
Fruits	2–3 servings	¼ cup cooked, frozen or canned ½ piece fresh ¼ cup 100% juice	¼ cup cooked, frozen or canned ½ piece fresh ⅓ cup 100% juice	½ cup cooked, frozen or canned 1 piece fresh ½ cup 100% juice
Vegetables	2–3 servings	¼ cup cooked	¼ cup cooked ½ cup salad	½ cup cooked 1 cup salad
Grains	6–11 servings	½ slice bread ¼ cup cooked cereal, rice or pasta ⅓ cup dry cereal 2–3 crackers	½ slice bread ⅓ cup cooked cereal, rice or pasta ½ cup dry cereal 3–4 crackers	1 slice bread ½ cup cooked cereal, rice or pasta ¾ - 1 cup dry cereal 4–5 crackers
Meats and other proteins	2 servings	1 ounce meat, fish, chicken or tofu ¼ cup cooked beans ½ egg	1 ounce meat, fish, chicken or tofu ⅓ cup cooked beans 1 egg	2 – 3 ounces meat, fish, chicken or tofu ½ cup cooked beans 1 or 2 eggs
Dairy	2–3 servings	½ cup milk ½ ounce cheese ⅓ cup yogurt	½ cup milk 1 ounce cheese ½ cup yogurt	1 cup milk 1 ounce cheese ¾ - 1 cup yogurt

Source: *Energy In Energy Out: Finding the Right Balance for Your Children*, American Academy of Pediatrics, 2014.



Tips for reaching and maintaining a healthy weight:

- Don't encourage your child to clean his or her plate. Encourage your child to rely on his or her body to give the signal of fullness.
 - Don't discourage snacking before meals. Healthy snacks before meals are OK. This prevents children from overeating at mealtime.
 - Get the whole family involved with physical activity and healthy eating. This sets a healthy example, offers your child support, encouragement and accountability and keeps your child from feeling singled out or alone.
 - Buy most items from the perimeter of the grocery store where you'll find fresh fruits and veggies, low-fat dairy and lean meats. If your child pressures you to buy unhealthy foods, leave him or her at home.
 - When eating out, choose foods that are baked, broiled, steamed or roasted. Ask for low-fat or fat-free options in dairy and dressings. Pick food without gravy or heavy creams, as these are often loaded with unhealthy fats. Ask for salad dressing on the side, and dip your fork in rather than pouring dressing on top. This way, you can control your intake. Pick drinks without added sugars, such as water, unsweetened tea or diet versions of drinks.
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Using a nutrition facts label

It will be helpful to learn how to properly read a nutrition label. This will aid in figuring out what is or isn't a healthy option.

How to read a food label

Food labels help you ensure that you're eating a healthy, balanced diet. Read food labels when you choose food at the grocery store, as you plan meals and as you cook every day.

Food Label Terms

Learning what the words on food labels mean will help you build your weight-loss plan.

- Fortified: foods with added vitamins or minerals
- Low Fat: contains three grams of fat or less per serving and 30 percent or less of total calories
- Reduced Fat: contains at least 25 percent less fat than the product's original version (not necessarily low-fat)
- Heart Healthy: meets American Heart Association guidelines for low saturated fat and cholesterol

On a food label, ingredients are listed in order of weight. Therefore, ingredients that are high on the list are present in the largest amounts.

1. Check the serving size and number.

The Nutrition Facts Label information is based on ONE serving. Look at the serving size and how many servings you are actually consuming.

2. Calories count.

Pay attention to the amount of calories. You'll see the number of calories per serving and the calories from fat in each serving. Remember: Fat-free doesn't mean calorie-free.

3. Know your fats.

Choose foods that are lowest in saturated fat, trans fat and cholesterol. Trans fat doesn't have a percent daily value (% DV), but it increases your risk of heart disease. Total fat includes all different kinds of fats. To lower blood cholesterol, replace saturated and trans fats with monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats found in fish, nuts and liquid vegetable oils. Limit sodium to help reduce your risk of high blood pressure.

Nutrition Facts

1 Serving Size 1 cup (228g)
Servings Per Container 2

2 Amount Per Serving
Calories 250 **Calories from Fat** 110

3 % Daily Value*

Total Fat 12g 18%
Saturated Fat 3g 15%
Trans Fat 3g

Cholesterol 30mg 10%

Sodium 470mg 20%

Potassium 700mg 20%

Total Carbohydrate 31g 10%

Dietary Fiber 0g 0%

Sugars 5g

Protein 5g

Vitamin A 4%

Vitamin C 2%

Calcium 20%

Iron 4%

* Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your Daily Values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs.

		Calories: 2,000	2,500
Total fat	Less than	65g	80g
Sat fat	Less than	20g	25g
Cholesterol	Less than	300mg	300mg
Sodium	Less than	2,400mg	2,400mg
Total Carbohydrate		300g	375g
Dietary Fiber		25g	30g



4. Reach for healthy, wholesome carbohydrates.

- Fiber and sugars are types of carbohydrates. Healthy sources, like fruits, vegetables, beans and whole grains, can reduce the risk of heart disease and improve digestive functioning.
- Whole-grain foods can't always be identified by color or name, such as multi-grain or wheat. Look for the "whole" grain listed first in the ingredient list, such as whole wheat, brown rice or whole oats.
- There isn't a % DV for sugar, but you can compare the sugar content in grams among products.
- Limit foods with added sugars (sucrose, glucose, fructose, corn syrup or maple syrup), which add calories but not nutrients, such as vitamins and minerals. Make sure that added sugars are not one of the first few items in the ingredients list.

5. For protein, choose foods that are lower in fat.

- Most Americans get plenty of protein, but not always from the healthiest sources.
- When choosing a food for its protein content, such as meat, poultry, dry beans, milk and milk products, make choices that are lean, low-fat or fat-free.

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% Daily Value*

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Trans Fat 3g	
Cholesterol 30mg	10%
Sodium 470mg	20%
Potassium 700mg	20%
4 Total Carbohydrate 31g	10%
Dietary Fiber 0g	0%
Sugars 5g	
5 Protein 5g	
Vitamin A	4%
Vitamin C	2%
Calcium	20%
Iron	4%

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Dietary Fiber		25g	30g



6. Look for foods that are rich in these nutrients.

- Use the label not only to limit fat and sodium, but also to increase nutrients that promote good health and may protect you from disease.
- Some Americans don't get enough vitamins A and C, potassium, calcium and iron, so choose the brand with the higher % DV for these nutrients.
- Get the most nutrition for your calories — compare the calories to the nutrients you would be getting to make a healthier food choice.

7. The % DV is a key to a balanced diet.

- The % DV is a general guide to help you link nutrients in a serving of food to their contribution to your total daily diet. It can help you determine if a food is high or low in a nutrient — 5 percent or less is low, 20 percent or more is high. You can use the % DV to make dietary trade-offs with other foods throughout the day. The * is a reminder that the % DV is based on a 2,000-calorie diet. You may need more or less, but the % DV is still a helpful gauge.

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Amount Per Serving

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% Daily Value*

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Additional resources*

For additional information about healthy and active kids and teens, you can contact these resources. These are independent organizations that provide educational information on behalf of your health plan.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

www.cdc.gov/healthyweight/children/index.html

American Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics

www.eatright.org/resources/for-kids

WE CAN: Ways to Enhance Children's Activity and Nutrition

www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/educational/wecan/

To access printable and interactive tools like fitness planners, journals, a BMI calculator and a target heart rate calculator.

www.girlshealth.gov/about/freestuff/index.html

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