

# Advice for Parents

## Encouraging Change

Helping Children to manage their weight requires a lot of support from other members of the family. If possible try not to single out your child for special treatment. Any changes you make should benefit the whole family and parents and carers can set a good example e.g. by being active themselves.

Start by encouraging small changes such as limiting sweets, fizzy drinks, chocolate, cakes and biscuits and providing plenty of fruit. Agreeing some dietary and activity goals together can help your child feel involved, and they are more likely to keep them.

Try to establish a routine. Remember it is important that the whole family eats three balanced meals a day with healthy snacks if needed in between. Aim to get your children physically active for at least an hour every day. This needn't be an hour of continuous activity – it can be made up of 10-15 minutes bite – sized amounts. Adults should take part in at least 30 minutes of activity most days of the week, and up to an hour is recommended for weight loss.

Remember that any changes you make should be part of your family's new lifestyle and not just a quick fix. Going back to the way you used to do things is likely to result in your child gaining more weight. Try to be firm and consistent in setting out the new family ground rules, and involve them and any other older family members in this process.

Most children will find the changes hard, especially in the beginning. Encourage good behaviour with a special treat such as a day or trip to the cinema. Avoid using food as a treat or compensation if your child gets hurt or upset.

## The Healthy Way to Manage Your Child's Weight

It's been estimated one in three children are overweight, almost double the number of a decade ago. There's clearly a risk for their health but being overweight also has a big impact on a child's self-esteem and confidence.

**So what's the solution? No one wants to see their child on fad diets, ruining their health. The best thing you can do is to encourage a balanced diet and regular physical activity.**

### Build self-esteem

If you can help children feel more positive about themselves, they're more likely to make healthier food choices.

- **Don't put a child on a diet**

**You shouldn't restrict your child's calorie intake without the advice of a doctor or dietician. They could miss out on important nutrients, or eat high-calorie foods on secret. Instead, make healthy changes.**

- **Set a good example**

Good are more likely to copy what you do than what you say. Share mealtimes and eat the same dishes.

- **Don't ban any foods**

**Banning a food only increases children's desire for it. Allow all foods, but explain that certain ones should be eaten only once in a while or kept as occasional treats.**

- **Provide healthy snacks**

Limit biscuits, crisps and chocolate and keep them out of reach. Ensure there are plenty of healthier alternatives: fresh fruit, low-fat yogurt, nuts, wholemeal toast, and wholegrain breakfast cereals.

- **Get them moving**

**Look for ways to incorporate activity into everything they do, and make this as much fun as possible. Walk or cycle with them to and from school. Exercise together as a family – swimming, playing football, a family walk or bike ride.**

- **Limit the time they spend watching television**

Plan and agree exactly what your children will watch on television and agree on a defined time period. Once the programmes have finished, switch off the television, no matter how much they protest. Don't place a television in your children's bedrooms.

## Little movers & shakers

The clever way to get reluctant children exercising is to build activity into their routines, set an example and make it fun

It's easy to worry about childhood obesity and the associated health problems, given all the scare stories in the newspapers and on television.

But the good news is that regular exercise, teamed with a healthy diet, is the perfect formula to help keep your child slim, fit and full of energy.

Recent studies have found that physical activity helps reduce children's risk of certain diseases, and good for their self-esteem and mental wellbeing. Active children are also less likely to become smokers and practising a sport or activity helps teach youngsters countless extra skills, everything from co-ordination to concentration.

The benefits of exercise are so far-reaching that's a great shame only three out of 10 boys and four out of 10 girls are meeting the recommended one hour a day of physical activity. Too much television watching and playing on computers are blamed, as is being driven – not walking – to school. Fortunately, there are simple, straightforward ways to get our kids more active.

The latest approach to fitness is to switch off the computer and let them rediscover adventure and old-fashioned imaginative play, such as pirate ship and treasure hunts. Why not start by leaving the car and walking?

Don't worry about clearing a full 60 minutes each day for a mammoth exercise session. Researchers say that activity can be broken up into shorter bouts of 10 minutes or more. It's as easy as that . . .

### Play your way to fitness

If your child isn't sporty you need to think imaginatively. Take inspiration from old-fashioned family games.

- **Arrange a treasure hunt or scavenger hunt in the garden or your local park. Kids will do anything for a prize – even join in a mini-sprint contest.**
- **Make a den;** all that hunting for materials, bending and tunnelling is a great workout!
- **Play sardines.** It doesn't feel like exercise but burns energy.
- **Devise obstacle courses** with ropes, buckets and dressing up clothes. Let Dad lead the way!
- **Try hula hooping, handstands or stage limbo-dancing competitions.** Great for little waists.
- **Get them to invent dances** to their favourite songs, dress up and perform them.
- **Rediscover charades.** It builds teamwork, and mine can be very energetic.

If you have one child, introduce them to hopscotch and jumping jacks, get them to time themselves (and you) in short running races, or even use a pedometer to count the number of steps between things, such as your house and the park.

### Tailor-made fun

Here's what different activities can do for a child

- **Cycling:** burns calories, builds stamina and strengthens the lower body.
- **Football:** good for cardio fitness, coordination, and builds bone density.
- **Yoga:** boosts flexibility and body confidence, also improves posture and bone density.
- **Swimming:** great for overall cardio fitness.
- **Walking:** boosts overall fitness and stamina, can be done anywhere and it's free.
- **Ballet:** improves flexibility, stamina and posture.

**Kickboxing:** good for balance, flexibility, and boosts concentration

**Tennis:** develops hand-eye co-ordination, good for cardio fitness and strength.

## Healthy Eating

Limit sweets, chocolate, cakes and biscuits

Introduce more fresh fruit

Avoid pies and pastries

Slowly increase the amount and variety of vegetables every day

Fry less often

Grill, poach, boil or casserole family meals instead

Try to use less spreading fat in bread

Ensure the family has three meals a day including a healthy breakfast

Introduce wholegrain cereals and bread

Try using semi-skimmed milk or, if your if your children are all over five, skimmed milk

Hide the sugar bowl

Check out portion sizes especially of meat and cheese

Get you children involved in cooking their own healthy meals

Encourage children to drink more water with funky water bottles

Limit eating out or try healthier options

Send your child to school with a healthy packed lunch

Encourage your children to grow their very own vegetables and fruit

## More Physical Activity

Go for a regular family walk

Walk or cycle to school everyday

Take up a new hobby or sport

Join beavers, cubs, scouts or brownies or guides

Limit television or computer play to two hours a day

Go for a family swim

Join the air cadets, army cadets or sea cadets

Encourage the children to help more around the house and garden

Go ten-pin bowling

Feed the ducks

Take the children to the local park or adventure playground

Go out for a picnic

Visit friends with children or arrange to meet them at the park

Go for a nature ramble

Play table tennis, tennis, table football or pool

Learn to ride a bike or skateboard

Walk to the local shops

Ask your child to run an errand

Walk the dog more often or for longer

Start a paper round