

# Healthy, Fit Families

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Our Work / For Families / Articles for Families on Science, Nutrition, and Safety / Healthy, Fit Families

Children need to move their bodies and eat healthy foods. Families can promote healthy habits by encouraging children to eat nutritious foods and get some exercise every day. Here are some suggestions.

- **Follow the nutrition guidelines for children under 6.** Information on nutritious foods, portion sizes, and sample menus for planning snacks and meals are available free through the CDC.
- **Eat meals together.** You'll know what your child is eating, you can model appropriate choices and portion sizes, and you'll have fun talking and spending time as a family.
- **Steer your child toward healthier choices at fast food restaurants.** Look for salads, sliced apples, baby carrots, and low-fat milk in colorful containers.
- **Offer fun, healthy snacks.** Ants on a log (celery sticks with peanut butter or cream cheese topped with raisins), sliced fresh fruit on a skewer, or raw vegetables and low-fat yogurt dip are favorites of many young children.
- **Teach your child to listen to his or her stomach.** When children do this, they'll learn to know when they have had enough to eat. It takes 15 to 20 minutes after eating to know if you're really hungry for seconds.

- **Plan a taste-testing event.** Family members can taste and vote on new, healthy foods—veggie burgers, baby spinach, turkey hot dogs, whole wheat pasta, kiwis, and the like. Then make the favorites part of your regular menu.
- **Give hugs and kisses—not food—for comfort and encouragement.** This simple action helps children associate eating healthy foods with taking care of themselves. They are likely to grow up to be adults who avoid using food as a reward or a way to cope with stress.
- **Limit your children’s screen time.** Instead of watching television or playing on the computer, spend time together—go for a run, kick a ball around, ride bikes (or trikes), or take a nature hike.
- **Walk instead of driving to nearby places.** Leave the stroller at home. Park a few blocks from the store and walk the rest of the way. Get off the bus a stop or two away from your destination and walk the remainder.

Source: Adapted from the Message in a Backpack for L. Colker, 2008, "Trends in Children's Well-Being," News from the Field, *Teaching Young Children* 1 (4): 20–21.

**Audience:** *Family*

**Age:** *Infant/Toddler, Kindergarten, Preschool*

**Topics:** *Child Development, Physical, Fitness, Health, Nutrition*

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