
Encourage Healthy Weight in Children and Adults

Children need enough food for proper growth, but too many calories and too little physical activity lead to overweight. The number of overweight U.S. children has risen dramatically in recent years. Encourage healthy weight by offering children grain products; vegetables and fruits; low-fat dairy products; and beans, lean meat, poultry, fish, or nuts - and let them see you enjoy eating the same foods. Let the child decide how much of these foods to eat. Offer only small amounts of food high in fat or added sugars. Encourage children to take part in vigorous activities (and join them whenever possible). Limit the time they spend in sedentary activities like watching television or playing computer or video games.

Help children to develop healthy eating habits. Make small changes. For example, serve low-fat milk rather than whole milk and offer one cookie instead of two. Since children still need to grow, weight loss is not recommended unless guided by a health care provider.



Serious Eating Disorders

Frequent binge eating, with or without periods of food restriction, may be a sign of a serious eating disorder. Other signs of eating disorders include preoccupation with body weight or food (or both - regardless of body weight), dramatic weight loss, excessive exercise, self-induced vomiting, and the abuse of laxatives. Seek help from a health care provider if any of these apply to you, a family member, or a friend.

Additional Resources

Listing 1
Listing 2
Listing 3

Advice for Today

- Aim for a healthy weight. If you are at a healthy weight, aim to avoid weight gain. If you are already overweight, first aim to prevent further weight gain, and then lose weight to improve your health.
- Build a healthy base by eating vegetables, fruits, and grains (especially whole grains) with little added fat or sugar.
- Select sensible portion sizes.
- Get moving. Get regular physical activity to balance calories from the foods you eat.
- Set a good example for children by practicing healthy eating habits and enjoying regular physical activities together.

- Keep in mind that even though heredity and the environment are important influences, your behaviors help determine your body weight.

Be Physically Active Each Day

Being physically active and maintaining a healthy weight are both needed for good health, but they benefit health in different ways. Children, teens, adults, and the elderly all can improve their health and well-being and have fun by including moderate amounts of physical activity in their daily lives. Physical activity involves moving the body. A moderate physical activity is any activity that requires about as much energy as walking 2 miles in 30 minutes.

Aim to accumulate at least 30 minutes (adults) or 60 minutes (children) of moderate physical activity most days of the week, preferably daily. If you already get 30 minutes of physical activity daily, you can gain even more health benefits by increasing the amount of time that you are physically active or by taking part in more vigorous activities. No matter what activity you choose, you can do it all at once, or spread it out over two or three times during the day.

Make Physical Activity a Regular Part of Your Routine

Choose activities that you enjoy and that you can do regularly. Some people prefer activities that fit into their daily routine, like gardening or taking extra trips up and down stairs. Others prefer a regular exercise program, such as a physical activity program at their worksite. Some do both. The important thing is to be physically active every day.

Most adults do not need to see their health care provider before starting to become more physically active. However, if you are planning to start a vigorous activity plan and have one or more of the conditions below, consult your health care provider:

- Chronic health problem such as heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, osteoporosis, or obesity.
- High risk for heart disease.
- Over age 40 for men or 50 for women.

Health Benefits of Physical Activity

Compared with being very sedentary, being physically active for at least 30 minutes on most days of the week reduces the risk of developing or dying of heart disease. It has other health benefits as well. No one is too young or too old to enjoy the benefits of regular physical activity.

Two types of physical activity are especially beneficial:

- **Aerobic activities.** These are activities that speed your heart rate and breathing. They help cardiovascular fitness.
- **Activities for strength and flexibility.** Developing strength may help build and maintain your bones. Carrying groceries and lifting weights are two strength-building activities. Gentle stretching, dancing, or yoga can increase flexibility.

To get these health benefits, adults need moderate physical activity for a total of at least 30 minutes most days of the week, preferably daily, and children need at least 60 minutes per day.

Examples of Physical Activities for Adults

For at least 30 minutes most days of the week, preferably daily, do any one of the activities listed below - or combine activities. Look for additional opportunities among other activities that you enjoy.

As part of your routine activities:

- Walk, wheel, or bike ride more; drive less.
- Walk up stairs instead of taking an elevator.
- Get off the bus a few stops early and walk or wheel the remaining distance.
- Mow the lawn with a push mower.
- Rake leaves.
- Garden.
- Push a stroller.
- Clean the house.
- Do exercises or pedal a stationary bike while watching television.
- Play actively with children.
- Take a brisk 10-minute walk or wheel in the morning, at lunch, and after dinner.

As part of your exercise or recreational routine:

- Walk, wheel, or jog.
- Bicycle or use an arm pedal bicycle.
- Swim or do water aerobics.
- Play racket or wheelchair sports.
- Golf (pull cart or carry clubs).
- Canoe.
- Cross-country ski.
- Play basketball.
- Dance.
- Take part in an exercise program at work, home, school, or gym.

Health Benefits of Regular Physical Activity

- Increases physical fitness.
- Helps build and maintain healthy bones, muscles, and joints.
- Builds endurance and muscular strength.
- Helps manage weight.
- Lowers risk factors for cardiovascular disease, colon cancer, and type 2 diabetes.
- Helps control blood pressure.
- Promotes psychological well-being and self-esteem.
- Reduces feelings of depression and anxiety.

Physical Activity and Nutrition

Physical activity and nutrition work together for better health. For example, physical activity increases the amount of calories you use. For those who have intentionally lost weight, being active makes it easier to maintain the weight loss. However, 30 minutes of activity daily may not be enough to lose weight or maintain weight loss.

Physical activity and nutrition work together in more ways than weight management. Increasing the calories you use allows you to eat more, which makes it easier to get the nutrients you need. Physical activity and nutrition work together for bone health, too. Calcium and other nutrients are needed to build and maintain strong bones, but physical activity is needed as well.

Help Children Be Physically Active

Children and adolescents benefit from physical activity in many ways. They need at least 60 minutes of physical activity daily. Parents can help:

- Set a good example. For example, arrange active family events in which everyone takes part. Join your children in physical activities.
- Encourage your children to be physically active at home, at school, and with friends by jumping rope, playing tag, riding a bike.
- Limit television watching, computer games, and other inactive forms of play by alternating with periods of physical activity.



Physical Activities for Children and Teens

Aim for at least 60 minutes total per day:

- Be spontaneously active.
- Play tag.
- Jump rope.
- Ride a bicycle or tricycle.
- Walk, wheel, skip, or run.
- Play actively during school recess.
- Roller-skate or in-line skate.
- Take part in physical education activity classes during school.
- Join after school or community physical activity programs.
- Dance.

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). (2000). *Be physically active each day. Aim for Fitness.* Retrieved October 2, 2006 from Health.gov:
<http://www.health.gov/dietaryguidelines/dga2000/document/aim.htm>.

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