

# Physical Activity and Nutrition Information for Children Ages 6 to 12

## Physical Activity

Children need to move their bodies every day to grow up healthy.

Physical activity has many benefits. In addition to helping build strong bones and muscles, regular physical activity can:

- reduce the risk for heart disease, diabetes, obesity, certain cancers and joint conditions
- reduce levels of anxiety and stress
- increase self-esteem
- help maintain a healthy weight
- help improve concentration
- help maintain good blood pressure and cholesterol levels.

The American Heart Association recommends children get 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity **each day**. You can break up the 60 minutes of physical activity into blocks of 10 minutes.

If your child participates in a physical education class at school, he or she may need up to another 30 minutes of physical activity at home.

## Types of physical activity

There are three basic types of physical activity: aerobic activities, resistance/strength training, and balancing and stretching.

- **Aerobic activities** speed your heart rate and breathing. It helps improve your heart and lung fitness. Examples include brisk walking, jogging and swimming.
- **Resistance, strength training and weight-bearing activities** help build and maintain bones and muscles. Examples include lifting weights and walking.
- **Balance and stretching activities** enhance your stability and flexibility. Examples include gently stretching, dancing, yoga and the martial arts.

## How to add physical activity to your routine

If your family life is already packed with activities, set up a physical activity schedule. It may be easier to go for a walk or bike ride if it's on the calendar.

The following suggestions from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention can get your family started.

- Do physical activities as a family. Go for a bike ride, walk, skate (inline or ice) or play in the park. Choose activities everyone enjoys doing together.
- If your child is bored, challenge him or her to combine two parts of two games or sports or create a new activity.
- Get involved with community service activities, activity clubs, recreational activities or join outdoors groups.

**(over)**

- Explore different activities — especially during the winter. Try yoga, bowling, cross country skiing, ice skating, rope jumping.
- Involve children in active chores such as dog walking, house cleaning, car washing or yard work. Put on some music while cleaning and dance!
- Have an activity party. Consider a bowling, swimming or skating birthday party.
- Set up a home gym. Use household items (such as canned food) as weights and use stairs in place of a stair machine. Dance, run up and down steps, do crunches, walk, do outside activities (rake leaves, shovel snow) or make up your own games.
- Watch TV together in the family room or living room. During commercials, do stretches, sit-ups or march in place.

## Nutrition

From a young age, children can learn to eat healthful foods. By giving your child nutritious foods, he or she is less likely to be at risk for obesity and other health-related problems.

According to the United States Department of Agriculture, a healthful diet is one that:

- focuses on fruit, vegetables, whole grains, and fat-free or low-fat milk
- includes lean meats, poultry, fish, beans, eggs and nuts
- is low in saturated fats, trans fats, cholesterol, salt and added sugars.

## Eating smarter

Eating healthier means eating smarter. Your child can still eat foods he or she loves, but eat less of them less often.

To promote healthier eating, your family can do the following:

- Limit soft drinks and sweetened beverages (including juice).
- Limit sweets, treats and snack foods (such as chips, cookies and ice cream).
- Limit fast foods, fried foods and commercially prepared snacks.
- Drink more water and fat-free or low-fat milk.
- Eat more fruits and vegetables. Have kid-sized portions available as snacks.
- Eat family meals together. (Turn off cell phones and the TV!)
- Eat whole grain breads, cereals and pastas.
- Eat smaller portion sizes.
- Use oils that come from plants, such as canola, corn, cottonseed, olive, safflower, soybean or sunflower.
- Resist the temptation to have seconds.
- Take more time to eat. Eating slowly discourages overeating.

You do not need to change your family's diet overnight. Take small, new steps each week. Over time, your new focus on healthful eating will become healthy habits.