

Fact Sheet

A healthy lifestyle for a healthy weight



Developing good habits

Changing your lifestyle to achieve a healthy weight isn't as hard as it may sound. Changing a few "bad" habits and sticking to these changes may be enough to meet the goals for the family. Goals should be small and realistic for long term benefit and involve the whole family. Parents are encouraged to be a role model for healthy food and exercise habits.

Children, unless very overweight, should not actually lose weight, but **grow into their weight**. Deliberate weight loss in children can affect growth and development.

The 5 Key Messages

- Limit screen time to less than 2 hours per day (TV, electronic games, DVDs, computer, Ipad, MP3 or videos etc)
- Eat together once a day as a family without the TV being on
- Spend at least 60 minutes outside every day (playing or being physically active)
- Choose water as your main drink
- Eat breakfast each day

Handy hints

- Encourage **more** fruit (2 serves/day), vegetables (5 serves/day) and nutritious snacks (see [Snack attack ideas](#) fact sheet).
- Eat regular meals including 3 main meals and 2-3 optional snacks per day.
- Try not to let your child skip meals.
- Limit takeaway food and high fat snacks, use low fat dairy products, modify recipes
- Use low fat cooking methods (see Adapting recipes below).
- Learn how to read food labels ie look for products with less than 10g of fat per 100g

- Eat at the table and turn off the TV. (parents responsibility)
- Encourage your child to eat slowly and chew food well.
- If your child is constantly "hungry" they may actually be bored. Find something for them to do rather than eat
- Water should be the main drink. Fruit juice, cordial and soft drinks should be left for occasional treats.
- Plan your shopping list around healthy meals and limit high energy snack foods such as chocolate, potato chips, lollies, soft-drinks, fruit juice and sweet biscuits
- Where possible, choose grain based breads and breakfast cereals. Wholegrain products are more filling than more processed white varieties
- If unhealthy food choices are not kept in the house your child cannot ask for them
- "Treats" should be given occasionally.
- Plan rewards not related to food eg. Buy coloured pencils, skipping rope, a new CD, toy, magazine, piece of clothing, visit a friend, movies, park, zoo or the pool.
- Children do not need adult sized meals. Choose good quality protein foods with adequate serves of vegetables. Most children in Australia are not eating the recommended amounts of vegetables.

Adapting recipes

Favourite recipes can be high in fat, sugar and salt, and low in fibre, so they don't fit in with the dietary guidelines for good health.

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But this doesn't mean you need to throw out old cookbooks and buy new ones. Many recipes can be adapted to fit in with healthy eating practices, without spoiling the flavour or appearance of the dish.

Here are some hints to help

- Use low fat cooking methods ie BBQ, dry fry (in non-stick pan), steam, bake on a rack or grill
- Lean meat can be cooked on a low heat, using a non-stick pan, or you can brush or spray the pan lightly with oil before cooking.
- Choose lean cuts and trim off any visible fat and skin for all meat dishes.
- Can the meat serve size be reduced? - 125g (4oz) per person in the family is sufficient - this means 500g for a recipe serving four, or 750g for six people. Meat serves vary according to age; toddlers around 40-50g cooked meat (1-3 tablespoons) and children and adolescents is 65-100g cooked meat/chicken (1/2 cup mince/ 2 small chops/ 2 slices roast meat)
- If you need to reduce your meat serving replace with vegetables/legumes or salad
- Use less than one teaspoon of any added fat for a recipe serving four. If you can leave it out altogether, even better!
- Cook onions and garlic in a small amount of water, wine, stock or vegetable juice instead of browning in margarine or oil as many recipes state.
- Cream and sour cream are sometimes used to make sauces. These can be replaced by a light and creamy evaporated milk or a low/non-fat plain yogurt- but make sure you add this at the last minute, and don't re-boil the sauce or it will

curdle. For white sauces, use low-fat or skim milk in place of full-cream milk, and the minimum amount of butter or margarine.

- Use evaporated skim milk with a teaspoon of coconut essence or coconut evaporated milk (Carnation brand) as a replacement for coconut milk in curries etc
- Serve low-fat custard, yogurt, fruche or ice cream instead of cream as an accompaniment with fruit etc.
- Whip equal quantities of ricotta cheese and low-fat plain yogurt with a small amount of sugar or honey for a cream substitute.

Finally- Key Dietary messages:

Eat breakfast

Good breakfast choices include wholegrain low glycaemic index carbohydrate foods for energy and lean protein for fullness.

Choose water as the main drink

Soft drinks, cordials and fruit juices contain a significant number of kilojoules and are high in sugar, without many other nutrients. For this reason water should be the main drink of choice for children.

Watch the snacks

Limit high energy snacks and choose only one small packaged snack food for the school lunchboxes each day and a calcium rich dairy choice.

Choose low GI carbohydrates

Choose breads, cereals, rice and pastas which are low GI carbohydrate rich foods.

Have set meals and mid meals

Meals need to be consumed away from distraction such as television and ideally consumed with the family at the table.



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Add in the treats

Food and eating for children needs to be enjoyable and fun. It is important to include regular, portion controlled treats once or twice per week as this achieves a balance between good nutrition and overeating when these foods are available. School canteen or takeaway meals once each week, are two examples of treats that can be included on a weight control plan for children and adolescents

Eat plenty of vegetables and salad

Encourage your children to eat salad and vegetables for lunch and dinner. This will give a range of nutrients needed for good health.

Physical activity

Physical activity is a very important part of a healthy lifestyle for the whole family. Exercise not only helps to maintain a healthy weight, but it can be fun and make your child feel good! Exercise helps our children's bodies in many ways including:

- Helping growth and muscle development
- Keeping your child's bones, heart and lungs strong and healthy
- And may take your child's mind off eating whilst being fun at the same time

Australia's physical activity guidelines encourage:

- That children should participate in at least one hour of physical activity per day
- Children spend no more than two hours using electronic media (eg. tv, computer, video games).
- Children need at least an hour of physical activity per day, and more if trying to control weight.

Physical activity can be lifestyle / incidental exercise or 'organised' exercise. Both forms of exercise promote a healthy weight; however,

'lifestyle' exercise is usually easier to stick to long term.

Examples include:

Lifestyle exercise
Playing
Walking to and from school
Taking the stairs
Gardening
Dancing
Organised exercise
Weekend sports (netball, soccer)
Training
Aerobics
Swimming squad

Spend some time doing enjoyable activities with your children. This could include:

- Skipping
- Throwing or kicking a ball
- Roller blading
- Dancing
- Brisk walking
- Cycling
- Swimming - be sure to have an adult with you if you're not confident in water.
- Use a pedometer and build up the steps
- Consider holiday programmes and sport camps through the department of sport and recreation
- Enjoy activities as a family on the weekend

You don't need to join a gym or buy expensive equipment to have fun and make exercise a part of your day!

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How much and how often

Start by identifying a time that fits into your day to day routine ie before / after school or after dinner. By finding a convenient time it is harder to find excuses.

Slowly build up more vigorous exercises ie start with 10 minutes and gradually build up to 30 minutes most days.

Be realistic with your physical activity goals!

Remember

- Eat regular healthy meals, especially breakfast.
- Be active.
- Drink lots of water.
- Eat together as a family
- Limit TV viewing, DVDS, computers to less than two hours per day.
- If you think your child may have a weight problem then you should arrange for your child to be reviewed by your general practitioner (GP). This will include assessment of your child's height and weight.

This fact sheet is for education purposes only.
Please consult with your doctor or other health professional
to make sure this information is right for your child.

This document was reviewed on Thursday, 3rd April 2008.

the
children's
hospital at Westmead

www.chw.edu.au

 **SYDNEY
CHILDREN'S
HOSPITAL
RANDWICK**

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