

Top 10 Ways to Help Kids Build Healthy Habits!

You can help your child develop healthy habits early in life that will bring lifelong benefits. As a parent, you can encourage your kids to evaluate their food choices and physical activity habits. Here are some tips and guidelines to get you started.

1. **Be a good role model** - You don't have to be perfect all the time, but if kids see you trying to eat healthy and getting physically active, they'll take notice of your efforts. You'll send a message that good health is important to your family.
2. **Keep things positive** - Kids don't like to hear what they can't do, tell them what they can do instead. Keep it fun and positive. Everyone likes to be praised for a job well done. Celebrate successes and help children and teens develop a good self-image.
3. **Get the whole family moving** - Plan times for everyone to get moving together. Take walks, ride bikes, go swimming, garden or just play hide-and-seek outside. Everyone will benefit from the exercise and the time together.
4. **Be realistic** - Setting realistic goals and limits are key to adopting any new behavior. Small steps and gradual changes can make a big difference in your health over time, so start small and build up.
5. **Limit TV, video game, and computer time** - These habits lead to a sedentary lifestyle and excessive snacking, which increase risks for obesity and cardiovascular disease. Limit screen time to less than 2 hours per day.
6. **Encourage physical activities that they'll really enjoy** - Every child is unique. Let your child experiment with different activities until they find something that they really love doing. They'll stick with it longer if they love it.
7. **Pick truly rewarding rewards** - Don't reward children with tv, video games, candy, or snacks for a job well done. Find other ways to celebrate good behavior.
8. **Make dinnertime a family time** - When everyone sits down together to eat, there's less chance of children skipping good foods, eating too many unhealthy foods, or snacking too much. Get your kids involved in cooking and planning meals. Everyone develops good eating habits together, and the quality time with the family will be an added bonus.
9. **Make a game of reading food labels** - The whole family will learn what's good for their health and be more conscious of what they eat. It's a habit that helps change behavior for a lifetime.
10. **Stay involved** - Be an advocate for healthier children. Insist on good food choices at school, in extracurricular activities, and church. Make sure your children's healthcare providers are monitoring cardiovascular indicators like BMI, blood pressure and cholesterol. Contact public officials on matters of the heart. Make your voice heard.

