

# Steps to Better Health and Weight Control

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Here are some steps you can take to improve your health and control your weight.

## Exercise (that strengthens the heart)

1. Set a good example for, and with, your child by exercising for 30 minutes every day. The exercise should be strenuous enough so that you are slightly out of breath. **Don't make excuses!** You may want to start with shorter periods of activity spread throughout the day, such as two brisk 15-minute walks. A good goal is taking **10,000 steps** per day.
2. Encourage your child to pick and play a sport. It is important that your child make the choice so that it will be something he or she will enjoy. Find active role models. Encourage your child to stick with the activity for **at least four to six weeks**. It takes this amount of time to form a new habit or change an old habit.
3. Cut TV and video game time. Monitor the use of the computer. These activities are very addicting and will reduce a child's desire to exercise. Elementary-age kids should be limited to no more than two hours of TV or video games a day. Other "enemies of exercise" include time using the phone and laziness.

## Healthy Eating

Healthy eating habits require a lot of work. Junk foods taste better than most healthy foods because they contain more sweets and fats. Many foods and liquids contain **hidden sugars and fats**. Remember, it can take four to six weeks to change habits. Here are some quick tips for adults and children:

1. Drink lots of water!
2. Buy and drink only non-fat milk. It has all the vitamins and calcium of whole milk, but without the animal fat that contains cholesterol. One cup of whole milk has the same amount of fat as one and one-half hamburgers. If you cannot drink milk, speak to your health care provider about ways to get adequate calcium and vitamin D.
3. Once you have enough calcium from milk, there are no other liquids that you need other than water. Fruit juices have lots of natural sugars that taste very sweet. It is better to eat the fruits than drink fruit juices. **Avoid sodas**; even diet sodas have a sweet taste. Try to eliminate the craving for sweets.
4. Eat lots of **fruits and vegetables** each day. The food pyramid recommends five to nine servings daily. Vegetables have much less natural sugar and fat, which is why they don't taste as good as fruit. Encourage your young children to eat vegetables daily before they have any snacks or favorite beverages. Use stickers or star charts to help monitor their progress.
5. **Junk food is junk!** Avoid buying these products. Encourage family members to avoid spoiling your children with candy. By offering candy, well-meaning relatives encourage your kids to develop bad habits that will be difficult to undo in the future. Try to reduce how often you go out for fast-food meals. Use fast foods and junk foods as rewards rather than as routine. Have lots of healthy snacks available at home. Avoid "trans fats" (partially hydrogenated, saturated fats). These fats are bad for the heart. **Read the labels** on snack packages.
6. Eat three meals daily. Skipping meals usually makes people more hungry later, causing them to eat more than they need to. Your body will also end up storing the extra calories you eat as

fat instead of burning the calories. Even a little fruit or yogurt in the morning is better than nothing. Eat less towards bedtime.

7. Plan your meals in advance. Make a lunch for school or have your child make it the night before. Know when you tend to be the hungriest. Have plenty of water to drink and healthy snacks available when family members arrive home from school or work. **Avoid overeating!**
8. Eat dinner together as a family at a regular time if at all possible. Studies show that families that eat together will eat healthier overall. Try shopping for healthy foods together.
9. Serve your child (and yourself!) smaller portions. A child should not be eating the same amount as an adult. **Eat meals slowly!** Avoid rushing meals and taking second helpings that your body does not need. Eat until you are no longer hungry, not until you are full.
10. Once or twice a week have dinner without meat or chicken. Try pasta with a non-cream sauce or a large salad with lots of vegetables. Check with your health care provider to see if you are getting enough iron. Girls who have started their periods should take a **multi-vitamin with iron daily**.
11. Stay away from the kitchen or other places that tempt you to eat. Be careful of TV commercials advertising junk food. The companies that make these foods are out to get your money, not make you healthy.