

Setting the scene for healthy kids....



It can be hard to think past your busy lifestyle and the children's school schedules, and it's definitely not easy to ignore your child's demands for unhealthy snacks and take-away foods, or their preference for watching TV or playing on the computer to being active outdoors.

These options might seem safe and convenient, but left un-checked they can be dangerous for the health of your children – now and in the long term. Even if your child is not currently overweight, the 'energy imbalance' created by eating more foods that are high in fat, salt or sugar and moving less can lead to overweight and obesity.

What can I do?

Parents, schools, sporting clubs, local councils, community organisations and the media can all take steps towards encouraging healthy, active lifestyles for children.

As a parent, you are the one that can make choices and changes so that healthy eating and activity habits for your children start at home. This might mean changing the way you think about the food and drinks you buy at the shops, what snacks you provide for your children and what you do to help your children be more physically active.

Prompting children to make healthy food and activity choices for themselves can also be an effective way to establish better habits for your children. Prompts can either be verbal, or something that makes it easier for them to be more active or make a healthier food choice, for example; buying active gifts such as a ball or a skipping rope or only having healthy snack foods available for them to choose from.

Remember, making healthier choices does not mean that you can't reward or treat your children. Rather, it gives you the chance to talk with your children and come up with some fun, active rewards or treats that are not food-related. This could be going for a bike ride with mum or dad, a trip to a local park or swimming pool or a visit to a zoo or aquarium.

At home

You can act as a role model for healthy behaviour for your children. This could be as simple as trying to eat meals as a family as often as you can, involving your children in purchasing and preparing healthy food and using some of the time you currently spend in front of the television being active as a family instead.

more overleaf...

for more information and ideas on healthy eating and physical activity go to www.healthykids.nsw.gov.au





Talk with your children and set some basic rules that:

Limit the time your children spend watching TV or playing on computers to no more than two hours a day. For example:

- If there's a specific program that your child wants to watch, let them watch it, but turn the TV off once it is finished.
- Outside of homework done on the computer, you could set time limits for internet surfing and computer games and make those times later in the evening when it is not possible for your child to be outside being active.
- Do not allow your child to have a TV or computer in their bedroom. Rather, keep them in a common area of the house so it will be easier to monitor their use.

Encourage your children to be physically active for sixty minutes or more each day. For example:

- Provide opportunities for your children to be active after school either through active play or organised sport. Talk to your child about what they prefer to do.
- Make the time to be active as a family – walk with your children to a local park, go for a bike ride or walk the dog.

Encourage a balanced diet including fruit and vegetables, healthy meals and snacks and plenty of water instead of soft drinks, juices or cordials.

- Set limits on snack foods that are high in fat, especially saturated fat, salt or sugar and offer them only occasionally, not everyday.
- Have water available at all times at home instead of sweetened drinks.
- Discuss with your children and set a limit on the frequency and type of take-away foods that you will allow them to have.

Food shopping with children

Children as young as five can respond to television advertising for food and drinks and can 'pester' you to buy these products at the shops.

As children get older, there may be peer pressure to have certain types of snacks in their lunchbox and at home – generally the less healthy options.

To make food shopping a more enjoyable experience, you could try:

- Writing a shopping list and setting limits for the amount of foods that are high in fat, salt or sugar. This includes snacks such as lollies, chocolate bars, donuts, some fruit, cereal and muesli bars, potato/corn chips, hot chips and many types of savoury and sweet biscuits. Make sure that your children are aware of this limit.
- Allocate more of your budget to staple foods that provide the most nutrients such as fruit, vegetables, lean meats, breads and cereals (preferably wholegrain), rice and pasta.
- Choosing fruit and vegetables that are in season, as they tend to be cheaper and better quality.
- Plan to extend your budget by incorporating legumes like dried peas (eg split peas), dried beans (eg haricot beans, kidney beans), canned beans (eg baked beans, three bean mix) and lentils into at least two meals a week.
- If you plan on treating your child, prompt them to make a healthier selection that is lower in fat, sugar or salt or to choose something other than food.

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