

FACTSHEET

This fact sheet is for education purposes only. Please consult with your doctor or other health professionals to make sure this information is right for your child. If you would like to provide feedback on this fact sheet, please visit: www.schn.health.nsw.gov.au/parents-and-carers/fact-sheets/feedback-form.

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 unhealthy 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 and carers are encouraged to be positive role models for healthy food and exercise habits.

Younger 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 aim at this young age is weight maintenance.

The 5 Key Messages

- Limit screen time to less than 2 hours per day (TV, computer, video games, i-pads or tablets, smart phone)
- 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)
- Do not skip meals- Eat regularly - 3 main meals and 2-3 optional healthy snacks per day as this will regulate appetite

- Limit takeaway food and high fat snacks, use low fat dairy products, change recipes to be lower in fat
- Use low fat cooking methods (see changing 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
- 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 eg one take away meal only per week
- Children do not need adult sized meals. Choose good quality protein foods with serves of vegetables. Most children in Australia are not eating the recommended amounts of vegetables. See the Australian Government's Healthy Eating for Children' booklet for more information on recommended serve size of vegetables for different children's age groups: www.eatforhealth.gov.au/sites/default/files/files/the_guidelines/n55f_children_brochure.pdf

- 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

Changing 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. 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 of meat, and trim off any visible fat and skin.
- Monitor the portion sizes of meats. Consider reducing the meat serving by replacing with vegetables/legumes or salad
- Don't cook with a lot of added fat. Mono and poly unsaturated oils are best in small amounts ie 1-2 teaspoons for a recipe serving of 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 lower fat varieties or 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 based desserts.
- 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, high fibre cereals such as weetbix or Special k or multi grain bread 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 (e.g. low fat yoghurt or custard).

Choose low GI carbohydrates

Choose breads, cereals, rice and pastas which are low GI carbohydrate rich foods. Some products have the GI of the food on their labels (the lower the number, the lower the GI of the food).

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. Having set meals can help avoid consistent grazing. This grazing often leads to excess calorie intake, with people eating more than they think!

Occasional Treats

Both 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 excessively 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 and help them meet their recommended daily serves.

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
- Taking your child's mind off eating whilst being fun at the same time

Australia's physical activity guidelines encourage:

- Children to participate in at least one hour of physical activity per day
- Children to spend no more than two hours using electronic media (eg. TV, computer, video games)

Physical activity can be lifestyle activities incidental exercise or 'organised' exercise. Both forms of exercise promote a healthy weight; however, 'lifestyle' exercise is usually easier to stick to longer term.

Examples include:

Lifestyle exercise	Organised exercise
Playing	Weekend sports (netball, soccer, tennis)
Walking to and from school	Training
Taking the stairs	dancing
Gardening	Swimming squad
Walking the dog	Holiday programmes and sport camps through the department of sport and recreation

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 – under adult supervision if the child is not confident in water
- Using a pedometer and building up the steps
- Enjoying 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!

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 60 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, i-pads and tablets, 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