

# FACTSHEET

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## 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. Your family can reach healthy goals by changing a few unhealthy habits. Goals should be small, realistic and involve the whole family. Parents and carers can be positive role models for healthy food and exercise habits.

Moving your whole family to a healthier lifestyle has many positive consequences.

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. Check with your GP if your child is in the healthy weight range.

### The 5 key messages

- Limit screen time to less than 2 hours per day.  
**Note: The word 'screens' in this factsheet describes all screen and mobile touchscreen devices including TV's, Tablets, phones, computers and gaming consoles.**
- Eat together once a day as a family and turn off any screens.
- Spend at least 60 minutes outside every day (playing or being active).
- Choose water as your main drink.
- Eat breakfast every day.

### Handy hints

- Eat more fruit (2 serves/day), vegetables (5 serves/day) and nutritious snacks (see Snack attack ideas fact sheet).

- Do not skip meals. Eat at regular times - 3 main meals and 2-3 optional healthy snacks per day. This will regulate appetite.
- Limit takeaway food and high fat snacks. Use low fat dairy products and change recipes to be lower in fat.
- Use low fat cooking methods (see changing recipes below).
- Learn how to read food labels, e.g. look for products with less than 10g of fat per 100g.
- Eat at the table and turn off any screens.
- Encourage your child to eat slowly and chew food well.
- If your child is constantly "hungry" they may be bored. Find something for them to do rather than eat.
- Water should be the main drink. Fruit juice, cordial and soft drinks should only be occasional treats.
- Plan your shopping list around healthy meals. Try to not eat high energy snack foods such as chocolate, potato chips, lollies, soft-drinks, fruit juice and sweet biscuits regularly.
- Choose whole grain based breads and breakfast cereals. Wholegrain products are more filling than processed white varieties.
- If unhealthy food choices are not kept in the house your child cannot ask for them.
- "Treats" should be given occasionally e.g. 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](http://www.eatforhealth.gov.au/sites/default/files/files/the_guidelines/n55f_children_brochure.pdf)

- Have screen time rules in your house which apply to everyone. A good one is to have screens charging in another room so that they do not stimulate kids at bedtime and make it harder for people to fall asleep.
- Plan rewards not related to food e.g. 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. This doesn't mean you need to throw out old cookbooks and buy new ones. Adapt favourite recipes to be healthier.

### Here are some hints to help

- Use low fat cooking methods e.g. BBQ, dry fry (in non-stick pan), steam, bake on a rack or grill.
- Cook lean meat 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. Reduce 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 e.g. 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.
- Cream and sour cream are sometimes used to make sauces. These can be replaced by low fat varieties or a light and creamy evaporated milk. If you use low/non-fat plain yogurt 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 amounts 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 large 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

Eat meals away from distractions like the TV. Meals should be eaten at the table with the family. 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

Food and eating should be enjoyable and fun. It is important to include regular, portion controlled treats once or twice per week as this gives 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 very important for a healthy lifestyle. Exercise helps to maintain a healthy weight, and will make your child feel good! Exercise is important as it:

- Helps growth and muscle development
- Keeps your child's bones, heart and lungs strong and healthy
- Taking your child's mind off eating while they are busy doing something fun.

The Australian guidelines for physical activity are:

- One hour of physical activity per day.
- Less than two hours of screen time (e.g. TV, computer, video games)

Physical activity can be 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 programs 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!

## The psychology of it all

- Moving the whole family towards a healthy lifestyle has many positive side effects and family members will enjoy some of the changes.
- Talking about weight and health in a positive way does not start an eating disorder.
- Think about how you will do things as well as what you are going to do differently.
- As society changes it is more important than ever to think and plan for how your family can become healthier.

## How much and how often

Start by finding a time that fits into your day to day routine. E.g. before/after school or after dinner. By finding an available time it is harder to find excuses.

Build up to more vigorous exercise. Start with 10 minutes and each time add time so that you get 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 visit your general practitioner (GP). Your child's appointment will measure their height and weight.