

Health Education Fact Sheet

From Nurses for You

Nursing Best Practice Guideline

Healthy Eating and Physical Activity: Healthy habits that last a lifetime

When children eat well and are active every day, they will be healthier now and in the future.

Healthy eating and your child

Making wise food choices is important for good health in both children and adults. Healthy eating habits that children learn in their early years will last a lifetime. Be a role model for your child. All family members should follow **Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating** (www.hc-sc.gc.ca) when planning meals.

Healthy eating for your children means having:

- a range of foods from each of the four food groups;
- five or more fruits and vegetables every day;
- a healthy breakfast every day, such as whole grain breads and cereals, 100% fruit or vegetable juices;
- meals together as a family to encourage interaction with your children and an opportunity to role model healthy eating;
- three meals a day – it is important not to skip meals;
- healthy snacks, such as cut up fruits and vegetables, low-fat cheese and yogurt;
- fewer drinks that are high in sugar, such as soft drinks;
- fewer foods or snacks that are high in calories, sugars, and fats, such as chips, french fries, candy.

Physical activity and your child

Children need to be active at least an hour and a half every day.

To help your children get the exercise they need, you should:

- Encourage them to walk, bike, run, rollerblade or skateboard to school and other places in the neighbourhood;
- Talk to your children's teachers to be sure they are participating in physical activities during gym class, recess, and lunch time;
- Participate in physical activities with your children. Walk, bike, skate or play sports together.



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- Limit the amount of time they spend watching TV, playing video games or playing on the computer each day to 1 hour or less for children under 4 years old and 2 hours or less for children 4-8 years old;
- Keep the TV, computer and video games out of their bedroom;

Healthy eating and physical activity are important for your child's health

By eating well and being active, your child will develop a healthy body weight and learn good habits that will last a lifetime. People have healthy body weights when there is a balance between the energy (calories) they take in as food and the energy they burn off by being active. People who are overweight consume more calories than the energy they burn off. Children should follow **Canada's Physical Activity Guides for Children and Youth** (http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/guide/rl-1_e.html) for activities they can do to improve their health.

In Canada, the number of overweight and obese children is rising quickly. According to a 2001 report by the Public Health Agency of Canada, between 1981 and 1996, the percentage of obese children in Canada between the ages of 7 and 13 tripled. Overweight and obese children and adults are at increased risk for health problems such as Type 2 diabetes, heart disease and certain cancers.

While unhealthy weight can put children at risk, it is important to focus on healthy eating and physical activity and NOT on body weight, shape or size.

Where can I get more information?

Talk to your nurse, doctor or dietitian. These health care providers will be able to help you and your children improve your health through eating well and being active.

Make a list of healthy foods choices and the physical activities you can do with your children.



The purpose of this fact sheet is to help support healthy eating and physical activity for your children. You can get this fact sheet on our website for free. To find out more about our fact sheets and guidelines, go to www.rnao.org/bestpractices.



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