

10 Tips to Keep Kids Fit

The busy school year brings habits that encourage kids to become overweight or obese. Here's how to help your children lose weight or stay fit all year long.

By [Anne L. Fritz](#)

Medically reviewed by [Kevin O. Hwang, MD, MPH](#)



Approximately 16 percent of American children are obese, and 32 percent are overweight, according to research published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. Parents need to be aware that healthy weight in childhood is more than an aesthetic issue. Studies show that obesity in children and [teens](#) can be a predictor of not only a person's weight later in life, but also overall health and longevity. In fact, a recent study that followed 227,000 Norwegians from adolescence to middle age found that those who were overweight or obese as teens were three to four times more likely to die of heart disease. In addition, the risk of death from colon cancer and respiratory diseases, including asthma and emphysema, was two to three times higher in the subjects who were overweight or obese as teens. Yet, as concerned parents know, getting children to eat healthfully and [exercise](#) more frequently is easier said than done. Read on for tips on getting children to eat healthier and exercise more.

Nutrition Tips to Fight Obesity

Eat meals together. Having family meals together helps adolescents eat more fruits, vegetables, and fiber and fewer fatty foods and soft drinks.

Even if you don't have time to eat a family meal every night, make sure you have healthy options in the kitchen to avoid last-minute dinners of fast food or takeout, which tend to be higher in fat and calories than home-cooked meals. Some good options to have on hand are pre-washed lettuce, baby carrots, nitrate-free cold cuts, hummus, whole-grain bread, and almond butter.

Make favorite dishes healthier. You don't have to serve kids only salads and baked chicken. But do make their favorites, like tacos, pasta, and pizza in a healthier way. Try using olive oil instead of butter, and reducing the amount of cheese, sour cream, and other high-fat dairy products used in the recipes. Sneak extra veggies into tomato sauces, or use green peppers and broccoli as pizza toppings. For sandwiches, use whole-grain bread instead of white bread and low-fat versions of condiments like mayonnaise.

Limit [soda](#) and [juice](#). Both contain lots of sugar and calories. If you do serve juice, dilute it with seltzer to lower the calories. Keep filtered water in the fridge so it is available and cold when kids need a drink.

Offer treats in moderation. Ice cream, cake, candy, and cookies should be limited to special occasions like birthday parties, holidays, amusement park trips, and other infrequent occurrences or celebrations. As alternatives, keep plenty of fruits like apples, bananas, grapes, and berries washed and easily accessible.

Pack a lunch. Let your child help plan his or her weekly [school lunches](#). Not only will you likely save money, the meal will be healthier, too. Some good options include hummus in a whole-wheat pita with cucumbers, yogurt, homemade soups in a thermos, hard-boiled eggs, apples, nuts, and tuna sandwiches without mayo.

Exercise Tips for Losing Weight (or Staying Fit)

With gym classes being cut across the nation — Texas public high schools now only require a single semester of physical education — it's more important than ever to encourage fitness at home.

Sneak in exercise. "If you make working out into a game or play time, kids will be more interested," says Francesca Meccariello, volunteer for Concrete Safari, a non-profit after-school exercise program in New York City. Meccariello suggests skipping, crawling, playing tag, and jumping for children 5 to 8 years old. Older kids can play freeze tag, jump rope games, relay races, or run obstacle courses. The key, she says, is to make exercises "FUN"ctional.

Turn off the TV. Studies have found direct correlation between the number of hours of television that children watch and their risk of obesity. Video games and computer usage contribute to the problem as well. Limit the time your child spends on these sedentary activities to no more than an hour per day.

Chores count as exercise, too. Making the bed, mowing the lawn, and raking leaves all count as exercise. Assign older children more active chores and they'll exercise without even knowing it.

Get extra help. If your child's [school](#) doesn't offer extracurricular or organized team sports, search out programs like Concrete Jungle, Girls on the Run (a running program for pre-teen girls), or classes at the local YMCA.

Set a good example. Your kids watch what you do, so set a good example by improving your nutrition and exercise habits as well.