



How Can I Keep My Child at a Healthy Weight?

You can help keep your child at a healthy weight and prevent obesity by encouraging and modeling a healthy lifestyle, which includes a nutritious diet and exercise. The first step in reaching this goal is learning about diet and exercise recommendations and then setting goals for your child and family. Small changes can have big health benefits and will start your family on a course for better lifelong health.

What can I do to make sure my child is eating well?

It can be hard to decide what information to use when planning your child's food intake. The most important things to understand are the foods your child should be eating to get the nutrients needed to grow, and in what quantities. According to the United States Dietary Guidelines, children should do the following:

- ❖ Consume whole-grain products often; at least half the grains (e.g., breads, cereals, rice, crackers, etc.) should be whole grain.
- ❖ Consume 2 cups per day of fat-free or low-fat milk or equivalent milk products for children 2 to 8 years old. Children 9 years of age and older should consume 3 cups per day of fat-free or low-fat milk or equivalent milk products.
- ❖ Keep total fat intake between 30%-35% of calories for children 2 to 3 years old and between 25%-35% for children and adolescents 4 to 18 years old. Most of the fat consumed should come from sources of polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fatty acids, such as fish, nuts and vegetable oils.
- ❖ Consume sufficient amounts of fruits and vegetables.

You also can help prevent your child from becoming overweight or obese by following these guidelines:

- ❖ Minimize sugar-sweetened beverages to no more than 1 per day;



You can help make sure your child is receiving the correct amount of nutrients by learning how to read nutrition labels on food packaging and how to decode serving sizes.

For help [click here.](#)

- ❖ Minimize sodium intake to less than 2,300 mg (approximately 1 tsp of salt) per day;
- ❖ Prepare and eat meals at home 5 or 6 times/week;
- ❖ Provide a healthy breakfast every day; and
- ❖ Breastfeed during your child's first year of life and exclusively for the first 6 months.

What type and how much exercise should my child get?

Your child should get a mix of structured and unstructured physical activity each day. Structured play may include sports, games, weight lifting and gym classes. Unstructured physical activity is the type of exercise your child gets through everyday play. The recommended amount of each type of exercise depends on your child's age.

Toddlers 1 to 3 years old

- ❖ Toddlers should get 30 minutes of structured physical activity and at least 1 hour of unstructured activity on most days of the week.
- ❖ Toddlers should not be sedentary for more than 60 minutes at a time.

Preschoolers 3 to 5 years old

- ❖ Preschoolers should get 1 hour of structured activity and at least 1 hour of unstructured physical activity each day on most days of the week.
- ❖ Preschoolers should not be sedentary for more than 60 minutes at a time.

Children 5 to 18 years old

- ❖ Children should get a mix of moderate and vigorous physical activity for at least 60 minutes every day, up to several hours.

- ❖ Bouts of physical activity should last 15 minutes or more several times throughout the day.
- ❖ Periods of inactivity should last no more than 2 hours.

Why is physical activity so important? Don't kids exercise naturally?

Children today exercise less than ever before. Not only are they driven almost everywhere they go, but schools are offering fewer gym classes, and television, video games and computers have become the entertainment of choice for children. The combination of these factors has resulted in very sedentary lifestyles.

Do the new video games that incorporate exercise count as physical activity?

The new so-called 'exergames' or 'exertainment' may not be the perfect alternative to old-fashioned outdoor play, but they do offer benefits. A recent study showed that active bowling and running games increase a child's heart rate by 20 to 79 beats per minute and burn calories. Compared to resting, children between the ages of 6 and 12 years old burned:



- ❖ 39% more calories by playing a standard video game;
- ❖ 98% more calories by playing an active bowling game; and
- ❖ 451% more calories by engaging in an active running game.¹

While video games can provide some physical activity, they are typically low intensity and should not be used to replace all exercise. More intense, vigorous exercise is still necessary.

What can I do to help my child become more active?

To raise a healthy child, it is important to be a healthy parent. Tools such as the Healthy Home Self-Assessment and Action Plan⁶ (see Fig. 1) can help you evaluate whether your child is getting the physical activity and nutrition needed, and how family behaviors may be contributing. The Action Plan allows you to set goals for yourself, your child and your family (see Fig. 2).

Are some exergames better than others?

Popular exergames include *Nintendo Wii*, *Dance Dance Revolution*, *In the Groove*, *EyeToy: Kinetic*, *Yourself!Fitness*, *Guitar Hero* and *Rock Band*. Below is a look at the evidence for those games that have been studied.

- ❖ **Dance Dance Revolution (DDR)** requires players to use dance steps to match images on the screen. Dancing becomes harder and faster as the player advances to higher levels. A 2005 study of 11-to-17-year-olds showed that even at the “easiest” levels of the game, players’ heart rates increased enough to provide adequate cardio benefits.² Another study of teenagers found that playing DDR doubled participants’ heart rates and sustained an effective aerobic workout for more than 45 minutes.³ A study of school-aged children in West Virginia found that many children lost 5-10 pounds after playing DDR every day for several weeks.⁴
- ❖ **In the Groove** (a dance game similar to DDR) has been shown to increase students’ mile-run time by 14% after regular use.⁵ Students playing this game also showed improvements in social skills, academics, attention and self-esteem.
- ❖ For younger children (ages 3 to 6 years old), Fisher-Price’s **SmartCycle** provides similar health benefits by combining interactive animation technology with a stationary bicycle. The bike plugs directly into a television, and as kids pedal faster, they are guided through educational “adventures” on the screen. The SmartCycle provides moderate cardiovascular and health benefits.
- ❖ Other programs, including **Yourself!Fitness** and **EyeToy**, are intended to offer a cardiovascular workout by utilizing a virtual trainer and customized workouts based on the user’s ability, mood and other characteristics.



Figure 1: Weight Watchers Healthy Home Self-Assessment⁶

Healthy Eating
<p>On average, my children eat ____ fruits and/or vegetables in a typical day.</p> <p>[Selections = No (0), Not many (1-2 cups), Some (3-4 cups), Lots of (5+ cups), Not applicable]</p> <p>Optimal level is some or lots.</p>
<p>On average, my children eat ____ unhealthy snacks, unhealthy convenience foods, and/or soda in a typical day.</p> <p>[Selections = A lot of (5+ cups), Some (3-4 cups), Not much (1-2 cups), No (0 cups), Not applicable]</p> <p>Optimal level is not much or no.</p>
<p>On average, my children eat a healthy breakfast ____ in a typical week.</p> <p>[Selections = Never, Very little (1-2 times), Some of the time (3-4 times), Most of the time (5-7), Not applicable]</p> <p>Optimal level is most of the time.</p>
<p>On average, my children eat a healthy dinner ____ in a typical week.</p> <p>[Selections = Not very often (0-2 times), Some of the time (3-4 times), Most of the time (5-7), Not applicable]</p> <p>Optimal level is most of the time.</p>
Physical Activity
<p>On average, my children get ____ of physical activity in a typical week.</p> <p>[Selections = No, Very little (e.g., 30-60 minutes 1-2 days/week), Some (e.g., 30-60 minutes 3-4 days/week), A lot of (e.g., 30-60 minutes 5-7 days/week), Not applicable]</p> <p>Optimal level is a lot.</p>

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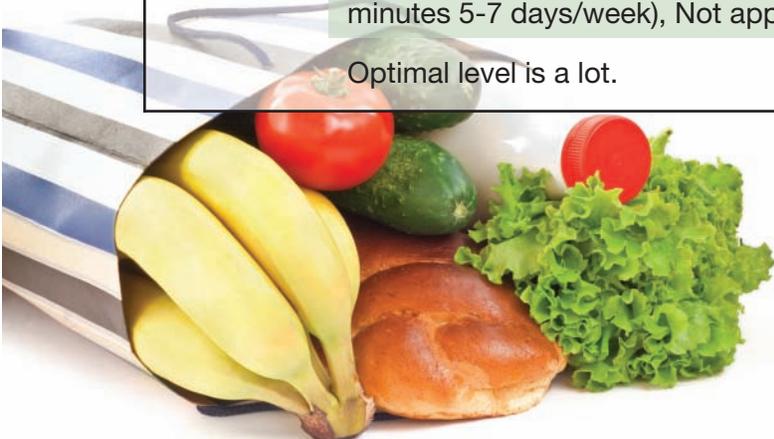


Figure 1: Weight Watchers Healthy Home Self-Assessment⁶ continued

Screen Time
<p>On average, my children have ____ entertainment screen time (e.g., TV, video games, non-homework computer use) in a typical day.</p> <p style="background-color: #d4edda; padding: 5px;">[Selections = A lot of (3+ hours), Some (1-2 hours), Very little (less than 1 hour), No, Not applicable]</p> <p>Optimal level is some or very little.</p>
Role Modeling
<p>My family eats and/or prepares healthy dinner's together ____ in a typical week.</p> <p style="background-color: #d4edda; padding: 5px;">[Selections = Never, Very little (1-2 times), Some of the time (3-4 times), Most of the time (5-7), Not applicable]</p> <p>Optimal level is some or most of the time.</p>
<p>My family is physically active together ____ in a typical week.</p> <p style="background-color: #d4edda; padding: 5px;">[Selections = Never, Very little (1 time), Some (2 times), A lot (3+ times), Not applicable]</p> <p>Optimal level is a lot.</p>
<p>On average, adults in my family have ____ entertainment screen time (e.g., TV, video games, non-work computer use) in a typical day.</p> <p style="background-color: #d4edda; padding: 5px;">[Selections = A lot of (3+ hours), Some (1-2 hours), Very little (less than 1 hour), No, Not applicable]</p> <p>Optimal level is some or very little.</p>



Figure 2: Weight-Watchers Action Plan⁶

SET FAMILY ACTION GOALS	
Healthy Eating	
Fruits/Vegetables	Eat at least 5 servings of fruits and/or vegetables per child per day.
	Eat at least 3 servings of fruits and/or vegetables per child per day.
	Buy fresh fruits and vegetables each week.
	Visit the local farmer's market each week.
Unhealthy Choices	Limit unhealthy snacks to 1 serving per child per day.
	Limit unhealthy snacks to 3 servings per child per day.
	Limit soda or other high-sugar drinks to 1 per child per day.
	Make it easier for children to choose healthy snacks.
	Limit unhealthy convenience foods to 3 times per week.
	Limit unhealthy snacks bought at the grocery store to 1 item per trip.
	Children bring healthy lunch to school at least 3 times per week.
Healthy Meals	Limit eating out to 3 times per week.
	Children eat a healthy breakfast every day.
	Serve appropriate portion sizes at all meals.
	Increase involvement in promoting healthy food options in our schools.
	Replace unhealthy desserts with more nutritious options (e.g., fruit, sorbet) at least 3 times per week.

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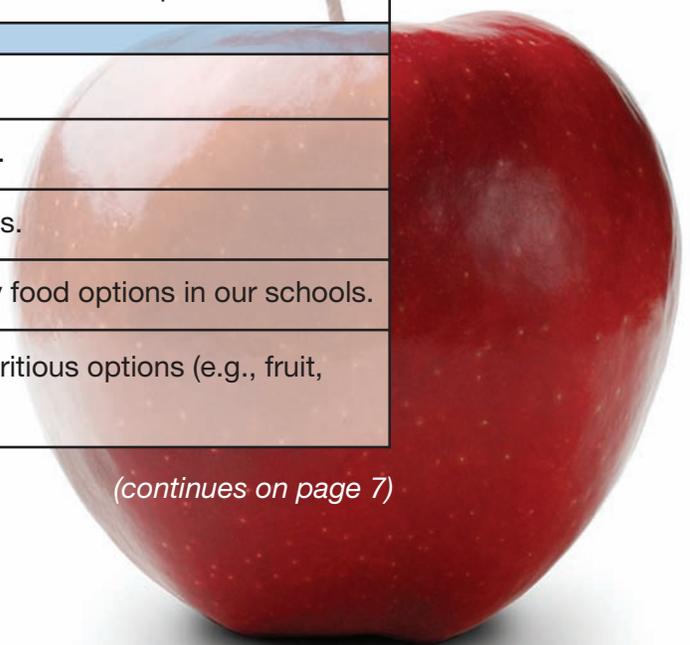


Figure 2: Weight-Watchers Action Plan⁶ *continued*

SET FAMILY ACTION GOALS	
Healthy Eating <i>continued</i>	
Healthy Meals <i>continued</i>	Plan healthy meals in advance for the upcoming week.
	Purchase items for healthy meals in advance each week.
	Prepare healthy meals in advance (and freeze them if needed) each week.
	Make it easier for my child to choose healthy snacks.
	Increase my involvement in healthy meals (work with schools to improve healthy options).
Physical Activity	
	Walk children to school, church, library, or other destination you would normally drive to at least once per week.
	Let each child choose a physical activity the whole family can participate in at least once per week.
	Make walking the dog the children's or whole family's responsibility each week.
	Create active alternatives for children not interested in structured sports.
	Reward children for good behavior with their choice of fun physical activities (e.g., batting cages, bowling) each week.
	Make active indoor and outdoor chores the children's or whole family's responsibility (e.g., vacuuming, mowing) each week.
	Create active alternatives for kids who are not interested in structured sports.

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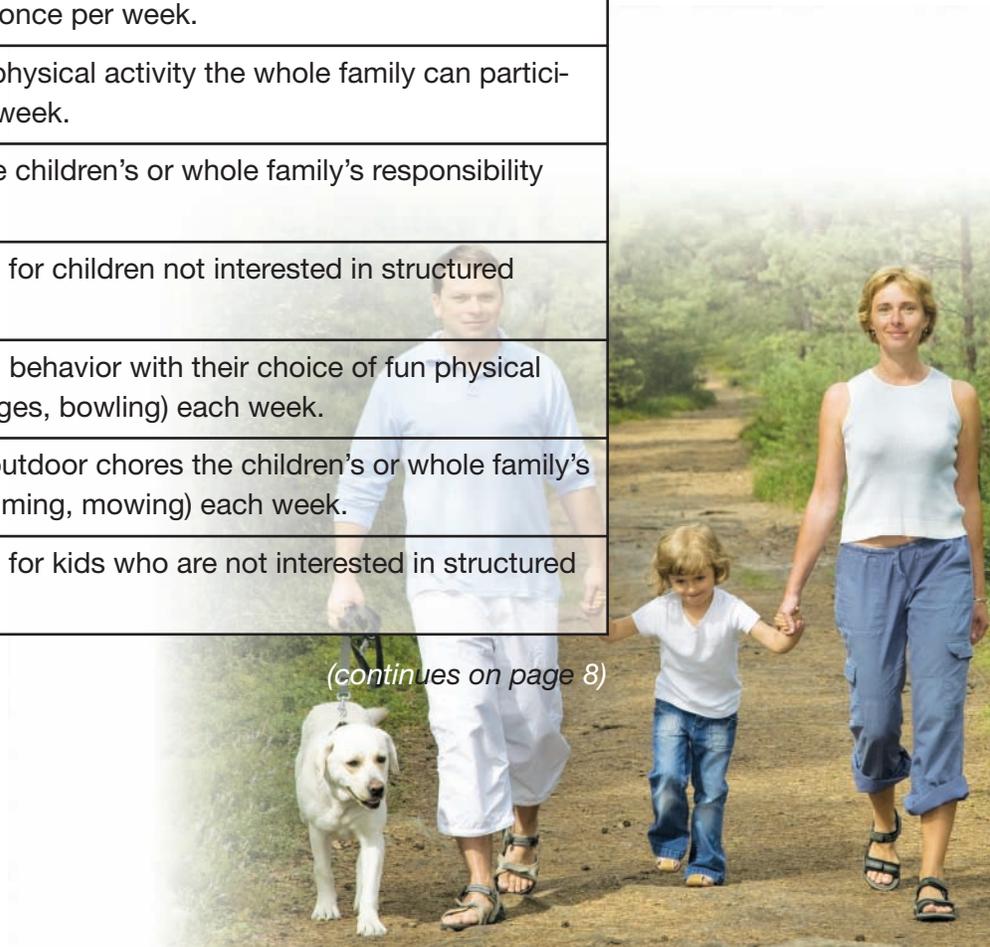


Figure 2: Weight-Watchers Action Plan⁶ continued

SET FAMILY ACTION GOALS	
Screen Time	
	Manage family free time without excess screen time (sharing responsibility of this with children).
	Limit total entertainment screen time to 2 hours per child per day.
	Make habit of having family use one centrally located TV.
	Limit TV time to 2 hours per child per day.
	Limit video game time to 30 minutes per child per day.
	Limit entertainment computer time to 30 minutes per child per day.
Role Modeling	
Healthy Eating	Eat healthy family dinners together at least 3 times per week.
	Involve children in healthy meal preparation at least once per week.
	Take children grocery shopping to choose healthy options at least once per week.
	Adults eat at least 5 servings of fruits and/or vegetables per day.
	Adults limit junk food to 1 serving per day.
	Adults eat a healthy breakfast at least 5 times per week.
	Adults bring a healthy lunch to work at least 1 time per week.
	Adults eat nutritious after-dinner snacks at least 5 times per week.

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Figure 2: Weight-Watchers Action Plan⁶ *continued*

SET FAMILY ACTION GOALS	
Role Modeling <i>continued</i>	
Physical Activity	Go on a family walk, bike ride, or other activity at least once per week.
	Participate with your children at sports practices each week.
	Adults maintain their own physical activity routine: at least 30 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity most days of the week.
	Take an active part in limiting overuse injuries in my child by focusing my child on sportsmanship, teamwork and adding a variety of activities to their day.
Screen Time	
Screen Time	Adults limit total entertainment screen time to 2 hours per day.
	Adults limit TV time to 2 hours per day.
	Adults limit TV time to 1 hour per day.
	Manage the family’s free time better (allow child to entertain themselves [i.e., play, read, color, etc]).
	Limit the number of TV’s in the house and make a habit of using one centrally located TV.



References

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