

As a parent, you can also help your child develop healthy habits by using these suggestions from the American Heart Association. Post them on your refrigerator or bulletin board as a reminder.

Top Ten Ways to Help Children Develop Healthy Habits

1. Be a positive role model. If you're practicing healthy habits, it's a lot easier to convince children to do the same.
2. Get the whole family active. Plan times for everyone to get moving together. Take walks, ride bikes, go swimming, garden or just play hide-and-seek outside. Everyone will benefit from the exercise and the time together.
3. Limit TV, video game and computer time. These habits lead to a sedentary lifestyle and excessive snacking, which increase risks for obesity and cardiovascular disease.
4. Encourage physical activities that children really enjoy. Every child is unique. Let children experiment with different activities until each finds something that he or she really loves doing. They'll stick with it longer if they love it.
5. Be supportive. Focus on the positive instead of the negative. Everyone likes to be praised for a job well done. Celebrate successes and help children and teens develop a good self-image.
6. Set specific goals and limits, such as one hour of physical activity a day or two desserts per week other than fruit. When goals are too abstract or limits too restrictive, the chance for success decreases.
7. Don't reward children with food. Candy and snacks as a reward encourage bad habits. Find other ways to celebrate good behavior.
8. Make dinnertime a family time. When everyone sits down together to eat, there's less chance of children eating the wrong foods or snacking too much. Get the kids involved in cooking and planning meals. Everyone develops good eating habits together and the quality time with the family will be an added bonus.
9. Make a game of reading food labels. The whole family will learn what's good for their health and be more conscious of what they eat. It's a habit that helps change behavior for a lifetime.
10. Stay involved. Be an advocate for healthier children. Insist on good food choices at school. Make sure your children's healthcare providers are monitoring cardiovascular indicators like BMI, blood pressure and cholesterol. Contact public officials on matters of the heart. Make your voice heard.