

Nutrition

- **Elementary school years continue to be important in shaping your child's lifelong health habits.** Healthy eating and activity habits improve the way your child feels and looks; improve academic performance; and help protect from a number of diseases.
- **Parents should focus on establishing a healthy lifestyle for everyone in the family.** Changes in eating and nutrition can be framed in terms of health decisions for the entire family. Children this age detect and point out differences in what a parent is asking the child to do and what the parent or other siblings are doing. Parents need to set boundaries for healthy eating and activity, but should ask for input from their children.
- **Healthy eating habits begin at the grocery store.** Parents who buy more fruits and vegetables, but few high-fat and/or high-sugar snacks find it easier to promote healthy eating habits.

Meals and Snacks

- **Develop a structured family meal and snack schedule.** This should include 3 well-balanced and thought-out meals and 1 to 2 snacks a day. Parents should serve meals restaurant style (portioning out food onto plates) instead of family style (everyone helping themselves from the food on the table). Family meals (everyone sitting together at the table) are important and have been shown to contribute to increased communication between children and their parents, decreased high-risk behaviors like smoking and using drugs and alcohol during adolescence, and better grades.
- **Parents should prepare snacks and have them ready for their child, especially after-school.** Try to include fruits and vegetables in snacks and include a protein (like peanut butter, milk, or low fat yogurt) to increase your child's fullness. Children tend to come home from school hungry and are often not able to make nutritious snack choices. Prepare snacks in advance and provide at least two healthy snack options.
- **Utilize the MyPlate visual guide to create well-balanced meals and snacks for your family.** For specific recommendations on the amount of each food group you should consume per day based on age, sex, and activity level, please visit chooseMyPlate.gov. For an idea of how many calories your child should consume (though we do not recommend calorie counting).

School Lunches

In 2012, the USDA (United States Department of Agriculture) unveiled new standards for school meals which focus on:

- Ensuring students are offered both fruits and vegetables every day of the week;
- Increasing offerings of whole grain-rich foods;
- Offering only fat-free or low-fat milk (1%) varieties;
- Limiting calories based on the age of children being served to ensure proper portion size; and
- Increasing the focus on reducing the amounts of saturated fat, trans fats and sodium.

If you feel the school cafeteria does not offer many healthy choices, parents can pack a healthy lunch each day; some ideas include:

- Prepare a turkey sandwich on multigrain or pita bread (a peanut butter and jelly sandwich is an alternative option).
- Add a piece of fruit and vegetables (such as lettuce, tomato, cucumber, etc to a sandwich or even a salad) to the lunch.
- Instead of chips, add a bag of pretzels.
- Pack a small water bottle, or encourage the child to buy low-fat milk in the cafeteria.
- Avoid pastrami, salami, and other high-fat lunch meats. (Use low-fat lunch meat with less than 3 grams of fat per ounce).
- Parents may also need to pack a healthy snack for after-school care or activities if one is not offered.
- Many children eat breakfast at school, so parents may want to check the menu's offerings. If selections revolve around items such as Pop Tarts, breakfast pizza, or sausage sticks, you may want to pack some non-sugared cereal and fruit as an alternative.

Healthy Habit Tips

Remember the message "7-5-2-1-0" for what healthy habits are important for your elementary-aged child.

- **7: Eat breakfast 7 days a week.** A nutritious breakfast is an important start to your child's day. Toddlers and preschoolers regularly eat breakfast, but as children enter elementary school, the number of children eating regular breakfast begins to decline. Eating breakfast jump-starts the metabolism, improves school performance, and prevents children from getting too hungry and overeating later in the day--habits that lead to excess weight. Simplify breakfast. Consider prefilling a bowl of cereal the night before (remember, try to eat breakfast cereals with at least 2 grams of fiber and less than 9 grams of sugar per serving) or get a piece of string cheese and a piece of fruit ready the night before.
- **5: Eat at least 5 servings of fruits and vegetables per day.** By making $\frac{1}{2}$ their plate fruits and vegetables at meals and including fruits and vegetables for snacks, your child will get the needed amount of fruits and vegetables.
- **2: Have your child spend no more than 2 hours a day on screen time** (TV, video games, recreational computer time, iPad, iPhones). Turn the TV off during meals. Keep the TV and computer in a central location of the house and out of your child's bedroom. It is tempting for parents to have televisions and computers in their child's rooms. This not only increases a child's inactivity, but also decreases parent-child communication and increases the unhealthy exposure to commercials and marketing that have been shown to influence and result in cravings for unhealthy foods. TVs in bedrooms also contribute to disordered sleep.

- **1: Have your child participate in at least 1 hour of physical activity per day.** This should be the activity of choice that your child prefers, which may just involve playing outside. Try to encourage outdoor time after school.
- **0: Try to have your child drink almost no sugar-sweetened beverages.** This includes soda, sweetened tea, sports drinks, fruit drinks, and even 100% fruit juice (collectively called sugar-sweetened beverages). They all contain a large amount of sugar which contributes greatly to excess weight. Consider not buying or bringing sugar-sweetened beverages into your home. **Water and low-fat (1%) or nonfat (skim) milk are the best drinks for you to drink.** Remember 2% milk is not considered low-fat. Children ages 6-8 years old need to drink 2 cups (8 oz total) of low-fat (1%) or fat-free (skim milk) or consume the equivalent from other milk products. (e.g. yogurt or cheese). Children aged 9 and older need to drink 3 cups of low-fat (1%) or fat-free (skim) milk or consume the equivalent from other milk products. These amounts will help children meet their calcium needs and obtain maximum bone density.

Fiber

Fiber comes from plants such as fruits, vegetables, and grains. Fiber is important in lowering blood cholesterol, reducing heart disease, and even preventing some cancers. **A good rule for fiber intake is “Age Plus Five.”** Your child’s age plus five equals the number of grams of dietary fiber he should eat daily. For example, a 6-year-old would need 11 grams of fiber a day; 25-30 grams of fiber a day are recommended for adults. Most fruits and vegetables have 2-4 grams of fiber per serving. Dried beans will have two to three times this much fiber. A slice of whole wheat bread has 2 grams of fiber, but a slice of white bread has only 0.5 grams. Low-fat home cooked popcorn is a high source of fiber. Reading labels will help you find out how much fiber is in your child’s food.

Is My Child Overweight/Obese?

Over the past 3 decades, the percentage of obese 6-11-year-olds has almost tripled, increasing from 7% in 1980 to nearly 18% in 2010. Contrary to the belief that young children will “grow out it,” excess weight persists into later life and increases the risk for weight-related diseases in both childhood and adulthood. Body Mass Index (BMI) is widely used to help categorize weight. BMI compares height and weight, and norms vary by age and sex. A BMI between the 85th and 95th percentile is defined as overweight and a BMI at or above the 95th percentile is defined as obese. If your BMI is in the overweight or obese zone, talk to your doctor about developing a healthy eating plan.

Sleep

Average sleep for the early school age child ranges from 10 to 11 hours per night. Poor sleep habits are correlated with obesity and difficulty concentrating in childhood. Parents should establish healthy sleep routines for their children, including set bed times even in the summer and not having a television in their child’s bedroom.

Recommended Daily Calories

Gender	Age (Years)	Sedentary	Moderately Active	Active
Female	4-8	1200-1400	1400-1600	1400-1800
	9-13	1400-1600	1600-2000	1800-2200
Male	4-8	1200-1400	1400-1600	1600-2000
	9-13	1600-2000	1800-2200	2000-2600

Sedentary means a lifestyle that includes only the light physical activity associated with typical day-to-day life.

Moderately active means a lifestyle that includes physical activity equivalent to walking about 1.5 to 3 miles per day at 3 to 4 miles per hour, in addition to the light physical activity associated with typical day-to-day life.

Active means a lifestyle that includes physical activity equivalent to walking more than 3 miles per day at 3 to 4 miles per hour, in addition to the light physical activity associated with typical day-to-day life.

Development

Your six- to ten-year-old is in a period of great social and intellectual growth. Children this age are learning how to use logic and reasoning and developing problem-solving skills. They will begin to try new skills in the outside world that they have learned at home. Your child must “find himself” and become more independent while developing relationships with friends and continuing to be an important member of your family. The habits and behavior patterns that your child develops now will influence his health, well-being and success in school, work and close relationships for the rest of his life.

- **You are your child’s most important role model.** Whether you are responding to people less fortunate than yourself or choosing food, your child will be watching and imitating. Live the values you want your child to have.
- **Communicate with your child. Find opportunities to listen to their thoughts and fears.** The better you know your child, the better you’ll be able to meet challenges and help solve problems as they arise. Respect and even admire your child’s unique character and personal skills.
- **Support your child in their ideas and be an advocate for them.** Involve yourself in their activities, guiding and encouraging them.

Physical Development

Your child will be growing steadily in these years. Most children this age grow about two inches a year. They may appear slim and their legs long in proportion to their bodies. Don't worry if people tell you that your child is too skinny unless your doctor is concerned. Your child's motor skills, strength, and coordination will improve. By 10 years old their skills (but not strength) are almost equal to an adult. A 10-year-old may be able to catch a fly-ball, build a model or learn to sew, but these would be very difficult for a 6-7 year-old. Try to notice your child's skills, but don't pressure your child to have unrealistic expectations.

Language/Speech

During these years speech becomes very adult-like.

- By age 6 all vowel and most consonant sounds should be pronounced well: f, l, sh, th, v are often just becoming clear.
- By age 7 all consonants and all vowels should be pronounced well: ch, soft g as George, r, s, wh, and z are often the final sounds to become clear. **If pronunciation problems persist your child should be evaluated by a speech therapist.**
- Continue to read at least a half an hour a day to your 6, 7, and 8 year old. By 9 or 10 your child may prefer to read on his own. Make sure there is quiet time to read.

Puberty Signs

Toward the end of this period puberty may begin. Girls may have breast bud development as early as 8 years old, but 10 years is the average. Boys may have enlargement of the testes and thinning of the scrotum at around age 11, but this may occur as early as 9 years. Soon after these early signs of puberty, pubic hair begins to appear. If your child is showing signs of puberty before these ages, please discuss this with your doctor.

Exercise and Sports

Encourage your child to exercise and be active daily. Tell your child to "go outside and play." As your child's role model, get outside and play with your child. Sports programs can help your child develop motor skills and become physically fit. Before your child enters a program, evaluate your child's goals as well as your own. Good reasons to be in organized sports are to learn teamwork and sportsmanship, learn to deal with success and failure, and learn that exercise is fun and can be a lifelong pleasure. It is the life lessons that are important, not winning or losing. Work with your child to find what sport or physical activity best suits his or her personality.

School

- **Make the effort to be involved in your child's education by meeting with your child's teacher at the beginning of each school year.** Find out the teacher's expectations for your child's work and classroom behaviors. Sometimes the easiest way to keep in touch with your child's teacher is by sending a note or email whenever you have concerns, questions or wish to set up a time to discuss your child's education.
- **Learning problems - If your child is having difficulties in school, you may consider the possibility of a learning disorder.** Learning problems, especially if not evaluated and treated, may cause other emotional, behavioral and family problems. 10-20% of children may have a type of learning problem.
 - **Examples of learning disorders are:**
 - Problems with academic skills such as reading, writing, math or spelling;
 - Problems with language and speech;
 - Problems with coordination, balance and writing.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity

Disorder - ADHD is a developmental disorder that affects behavior, attention and learning. Children with ADHD may have increased distractibility, impulsiveness, problems concentrating, easy frustration and dramatic mood swings. If you think your child may have ADHD, your child should have a complete check-up and consult with your child's doctor. Your doctor may refer you to other professionals to help diagnose or rule out ADHD. If your child has ADHD, he may be eligible for special education services in the school district even if there is no additional learning disability.

Safety

Accidents are the greatest threat to the life and health of your child. More children die from injuries than all other diseases combined. Most injuries are preventable. As your child becomes more independent, it is especially important to teach safety rules to your child.

- **Street Safety.** Never allow your child to play in or near the street. Teach your child to stop at the curb and look both ways before crossing. Children under 8 years old should not cross the street without adult supervision.
- **Bicycle Safety. Make sure your child always wears a helmet while riding a bike.** Parents must wear helmets also. Teach your young cyclist the rules of the road. Always ride on the right side of the street with traffic. Watch your child ride to make sure that he is in control of the bike and uses good judgment. Children under eight should not ride on the street without adult supervision. Grade school age children should not ride bikes at dusk or after dark.

- **Skate and Skateboarding Safety. Every skater should wear a helmet.** Wrist guards, knee pads, and elbow pads are a good idea for everyone. Mouth guards are good protection against broken teeth. Children should skate in areas well away from traffic. Streets should be off limits.
- **Car Safety. Most children this age need to use a booster seat.** Safety experts now realize that children have been switching to seatbelts too early. **Children 40 to 80 lbs and up to 4'9" need to be in a restraining booster seat.** Always check that he or she is correctly restrained in the booster seat. Set a good example. Make sure that you and other adults buckle up. The safest place for children, even through school age, is in the backseat of a car. **It is not recommended that they sit in the front seat of a car until they are 13 years of age.**
 - Children can move out of the booster seat when the lap belt can be worn low and flat on the hips and the shoulder belt can be worn across the shoulder, rather than across the face or neck (usually at about 80 pounds and 4 feet 9 inches tall).
- **Water Safety.** Swimming and playing in the water is fun and good exercise.
 - Teach your child water safety to prevent drowning.
 - Make sure your child is able to swim.
 - Only let your child swim while supervised by an adult who knows CPR.
 - If you own a pool, be sure it is enclosed in a fence with a self-closing, self-locking gate. Keep a life preserver and shepherds hook available.
 - Use a life vest when boating.
- **Sun Exposure.** Use sunscreen with SPF 30 or greater when your child is outside for more than a few minutes during the day. Avoid sun from 10:00 am to 4:00 pm. Sun exposure during childhood increases your child's chance of having skin cancer later in life.
- **Fire Safety.** Do not smoke or allow smoking in your home. Install smoke alarms on every level of your home and test the alarm every month. It is best to use smoke alarms that use long-life batteries, but if you do not, change the batteries once a year.
- **Gun Safety.** It is best to keep guns out of your home. If your family chooses to keep a gun, store it unloaded in a locked place, separate from the ammunition. Children in a home where guns are present are more likely to be shot by themselves, their friends, or family members than an intruder. Handguns are especially dangerous. Teach your child to leave a house or situation immediately if they see a gun.

Electronics and Media in Your Home

- **Video Games/ the Internet.** Studies of interactive media indicate that the effect of interactive "virtual violence" may be more harmful than passive media, like television. Studies show that after playing violent video games, young people show a decrease in helpful behaviors and an increase in violent behavior when provoked. Video games are an ideal environment in which to learn violence and in some people, can be addicting.
 - Parents need to monitor and help their children with media choices. Sports and non-violent strategic video games are preferable to games that glamorize carrying and using weapons.
- **The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) wants all parents to be aware that television viewing can contribute to:**
 - Violent and aggressive behavior
 - Obesity
 - Poor body concept and self- image
 - Substance abuse
 - Early sexual behavior

Monitor the shows that your child watches. Most programs should be informational, educational, and non-violent. View television with your child. Encourage alternative entertainment for your child, such as reading, athletics, or other forms of exercise.

Reading Suggestions and Resources

- **Caring for Your School-Age Child: Ages 5 to 12,** The American Academy of Pediatrics.
- **www.healthychildren.org,** A parenting website developed by the American Academy of Pediatrics.
- **www.choosemyplate.gov,** USDA Dietary Guidelines. This web site has a lot of child-friendly materials and practical information for parents.