

Simple Ways to Boost Your Child's Health

Article written by Tara Dunker (tara.dunker@unl.edu), MS, RD, Extension Educator

If you are looking to make changes to your family's eating and physical activity habits, remember that small changes can have a huge impact on health over time. Consider starting with one or more of these recommendations adapted from the Academy of Nutrition & Dietetics:

- **Shop smart.** To promote a healthy lifestyle, involve your children in the process of choosing the foods served at breakfast, lunch, and dinner. While older children can actively participate in generating ideas for grocery shopping, you can modify this approach for younger kids. Select a specific food group that you'd like your preschooler to include in their diet, then present them with two options from that group. For instance, you might ask, "Would you prefer yogurt or string cheese for your snack?" This method fosters a balanced eating pattern and empowers your child by giving them a say in their food choices.
- **Cook and eat together.** Involve your children in preparing meals. Be sure to choose age-appropriate tasks to set everyone up for success. For a preschool-age child, this might look like washing grapes, spreading peanut butter on bread, stirring ingredients, or pushing buttons on the microwave. Sit down as a family whenever possible to enjoy a meal together. Family meals encourage bonding and good eating habits.
- **Healthy habits.** As the role model of your household, one of the best things you can do to help your children form healthy habits is set a good example. Fill half your plate with fruits and vegetables, choose lower-sodium options, and make at least half the grains your family eats whole grains. For beverages, choose water over drinks with added sugars.
- **Get moving.** Aside from being a fabulous way to spend time together, regular physical activity strengthens muscle and bones, promotes a healthy body weight, supports learning, develops social skills, and builds self-esteem. Preschool-age children are encouraged to be active throughout the day, while older children and adolescents need at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous activity daily. This doesn't need to be accomplished in one shot, so encourage mini activity breaks to get that blood pumping throughout the day.
- Have fun, eat well, and be active together—you won't regret it.

This newsletter was peer-reviewed and updated in 2025. Check out more Family Fun on the Run articles: <http://go.unl.edu/familyrun>

Sources:

1. Helping Kids Maintain a Healthy Body Weight: A Cheat Sheet for Success, Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics: <https://bit.ly/3u74pVJ>
2. Klemm, Sarah. Teaching Kids to Cook, Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics: <https://go.unl.edu/and-kids-cook>
3. What is MyPlate?, United States Department of Agriculture: <https://bit.ly/2XKYXMv>

The University of Nebraska does not discriminate based upon any protected status.
Please see go.unl.edu/nondiscrimination.

