

Healthy Children are a Family Affair



Parents are children's biggest influences when it comes to healthy behaviors, so provide your kids with opportunities for family fun. You can help your children learn to make healthier food choices and engage in regular physical activity by being a good role model.

- Plan regular family activities together.
- Encourage children to take up an after-school sport.
- Take your kids to the park to walk, jog, inline skate or play catch.
- Make walking the dog a fun game by counting how many times the dog stops or how many rabbits or squirrels the dog sees.
- Encourage your children to help plan meals, from developing menu to shopping, preparing and serving the meal.

Make sure your kids know they are part of the team and that health and fitness are a family affair.

The Challenge of School Breaks

For parents and caregivers, spring, summer and winter breaks from school present challenges that may not be as much of a concern during the other nine months of the year, especially when it comes to lunchtime.

With many schools providing a balanced lunch program, parents can know their children have nutritious options at school. However, when children are home and are looking to you for lunch, parents and caregivers need to take the lead and provide nutrition that kids' growing bodies need.

A study by the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Foundation showed parents have more potential to influence their children's behavior, including their eating habits, than anyone else. In fact, parents outrank sports celebrities as the person the child "would like to be most," according to the survey. By eating healthy foods, and making sure to offer them to their children, parents (and caregivers) can give their kids opportunities to learn to like a variety of nutritious foods.

The 2003 Foundation study, *Family Nutrition and Physical Activity Study*, is more evidence that parents can positively affect children's development and behaviors all year long, especially in the early years when the influence is the greatest.

Reviewed December 2012