

Health Tips for Parents

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How can I help my child live a heart-healthy life?

Most children are born with healthy hearts. By making small lifestyle choices to encourage healthier eating and daily physical activity, you can help your children maintain healthy hearts throughout their lives.



“Parents should encourage their children to develop healthy diet and exercise habits early in life,” says Mark Sklansky, MD, chief of the UCLA division of pediatric cardiology. “By making a few small, simple lifestyle changes, parents can help their children reduce their risks of developing early heart disease.”



Physical activity improves mental and physical health. The American Heart Association recommends that children ages 2 years and older participate in at least 60 minutes (or at least two 30-minute periods or four 15-minute periods) of enjoyable, physical activity every day to improve cardiovascular fitness, physical wellness and emotional development.

Inactive children who have sedentary lifestyles and who spend too much time in front of

a screen (e.g., watching television, playing computer video games or talking or typing on their phones) have an increased risk of heart disease, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, obesity and diabetes. Too much screen time may also adversely affect your child's musculoskeletal development, posture, neck alignment, eye function and overall self-esteem and confidence.

Eating nutrient-rich foods and maintaining a healthy weight is an important part of heart health.

Nutrient-rich foods with a variety of minerals, protein, whole grains and other healthy nutrients, but with fewer calories, will help your child control his/her weight, cholesterol and blood pressure. Your child's diet should also contain no more than a limited amount of saturated fat, trans fat, sodium, red meat, sweets and sugar-sweetened beverages. By cooking at home and choosing the right ingredients, parents will have better control of the foods their child consumes.

The American Heart Association recommends that parents:

- Avoid smoking and using tobacco products
- Be physically active every day
- Eat a heart-healthy diet
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Maintain normal blood pressure
- Maintain healthy levels of total cholesterol
- Keep a healthy, balanced blood sugar level



Set a good example

“Making healthy lifestyle choices starts at home. Parents are usually the most important role models for their children,” says Dr. Sklansky. “By making the time to cook healthy meals at home and regularly participate in physical activities your child enjoys, it will be easy to incorporate heart-healthy habits into your child's life and daily schedule.”

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