

Helping Kids Make Healthy Choices

One of our jobs as parents and caregivers is to help kids make healthy choices so that they stay well now and grow into healthy adults. The best way to do this is to teach by example.

Kids do what you do more than they do what you say. Your child is likely to pick up your good and bad habits, so try to start adding more good habits to your life today! Here are some simple ways to be a good role model for your child.

Keep Healthy Snacks at Home

Start by making a list before grocery shopping to help you control what food comes into your home. Most of the time, kids will eat what tastes good and is easy to get. So have fresh fruit, pretzels, plain popcorn, bagels and sparkling water on hand. Take time before soccer practice or a day at the pool to pack up some raisins, water bottles and a bagel or two. This can help you avoid needing to buy snacks at vending machines, corner stores or a fast food drive-through window.

Involve Your Child

Teach your child how to read food labels. It can be fun to let them find out how much sugar or fat there really is in some of their favorite foods. Let them compare the sugar content of different cereals, for instance, or the fat content in cookies or ice cream.

Try out new foods and drinks:

- Let your child pick out a new fruit or vegetable on your next grocery shopping trip.
- Mix a little bit of lemonade with sparkling water for a great lemon soda with far less sugar than the kind in the can.



- Put plain yogurt, fresh or frozen berries, a banana and orange juice in the blender. Let your child push the button to blend up a yummy and filling snack.

Wear Your Seatbelt, Bike Helmet and Life Jacket

When it comes to safety, kids, especially teens, follow the lead of the adults they are with. Research has shown that if the adult wears safety gear, the child is more likely to wear it. If you don't or if you don't wear it every time, you give your child the message that being "grown up" means not using the things that will protect them.

Put Exercise Into Your Family Routine

Let your child see that being fit matters to you. Take turns choosing things the whole family can do. Try swimming, biking or playing tag outside.

When it's cold and wet, go to indoor skating rinks or pools. Children who have active parents are more active themselves. And studies show that children feel more confident when their level of fitness increases.

Don't Smoke

Being around smoke raises your child's chance of getting asthma, allergies, ear infections, bronchitis and pneumonia. If you smoke, the best thing you can do for your child is to quit. If quitting isn't possible right now, don't smoke around your child. Go outside and don't smoke in the car. Cigarettes are a "gateway" drug. That means, teens who smoke cigarettes are much more likely to try other drugs, such as alcohol and marijuana, than young people who don't smoke. And your child is more likely to start smoking if one or both parents also smoke.

Talk With Your Child

Talk about school and friends, and about tough topics, such as drugs and sex. Make sure your child knows your values and what you expect of them. The earlier you start to talk about these topics, the easier it is – for you and for your child.

Deal with Stress Well

Everyone feels stress sometimes, even kids. Show your child healthy ways to deal with stress. Avoid using alcohol, marijuana or e-cigarettes to relax. Instead, try things like deep breathing, walks, time outs and talking with a friend.

Focus on the Positive

When your child asks to go on a bike ride, tell them it's a great idea and go with them. If they

like bananas, make sure you keep some on hand. Support their healthy choices every time you can. That has a more lasting effect than storming in to stop a TV marathon.

Let Your Child Choose

Limit the choices to those that are okay with you, but do let them choose. It's the old, "Would you like cereal or a bagel? Milk or water?" routine, but it works.

Let Your Child Teach You

Of course, making healthy choices means much more than taking walks after dinner, or having frozen fruit bars in the freezer. It relates to what we eat, how we act with other people and almost everything we do. Being a parent makes you think about what "being healthy" is and how to pass it on to your child. Many experts believe the key lies simply in finding ways to keep choosing healthy options yourself. This way, you don't have to plan to teach your child; you just show them by your example.

No one is perfect, and not each move you make in front of your child is going to set the best example. If you fail, get back on track right away, without being too hard on yourself. If your child slips up, do your best to refocus them on positive things quickly.

If your child makes healthy choices early and often, you just might be surprised to find them steering you in the right direction.

To Learn More

- www.seattlechildrens.org
- **Your child's healthcare provider**

Seattle Children's will make this information available in alternate formats upon request. Call Marketing Communications at 206-987-5205.

This handout has been reviewed by clinical staff at Seattle Children's. However, your child's needs are unique. Before you act or rely upon this information, please talk with your child's healthcare provider.

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