



## Give kids a head start on good health

### Take a stand against childhood obesity

It's hard for parents to say no to their kids. Many adults themselves struggle to be healthy. But when children's health is on the line, adults have to help kids make the right choices. Doing so can prevent serious problems such as childhood obesity.

In order to keep kids fit in this high-calorie, high-tech world, parents need to be role models. Eat well and move more, and your kids are likely to do the same. They can better enjoy their childhood and be carefree and happy – the way kids ought to be.

#### Why worry about obesity?

It has become widespread among American children and puts them at risk for:<sup>1</sup>

- Heart disease.
- High blood pressure.
- Type 2 diabetes.
- Certain cancers.
- Depression and low self-esteem.

Obese kids are also likely to become obese adults. That means they would be at risk for various health problems for many years.

#### How did this happen?

A young person's health depends on a lot of factors. But much of the current obesity problem can be tied to changes in our society:<sup>1,2</sup>

- Kids aren't as active and don't have as many options for playing sports.
- Kids have more digital types of entertainment now. They're often glued to a computer, mobile device or TV.
- Healthy, affordable food isn't easy to find.
- Food portions at home and at restaurants are bigger than ever.

### Can parents do something? You bet.

## What you can do

Here are some ways to help keep kids healthy:<sup>3</sup>

- Limit TV, computer and video games to less than two hours a day. It's easier to do this when kids don't have TVs in their rooms.
- Help your kids get active for one hour each day. Try to make it as routine as sleeping and eating.
- Plan your menu. It's key to healthy eating. Following through with the plan is vital.
- Start the day with a healthy breakfast. Try whole-grain cereal or toast, low-fat milk, oatmeal, eggs or fruit.
- Sit down and eat together as a family. You can model good eating habits for the kids and make sure they're eating healthy as well.
- Watch your portions. Learn more about portion size at the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute website at [nhlbi.nih.gov](http://nhlbi.nih.gov).
- Make sure children get enough sleep. A lack of sleep can increase their risk of being overweight or obese. How many hours of sleep do they need each day?
  - Younger than five: 11+ hours
  - Five to 10: 10 hours
  - 10 and above: 9+ hours

When good health is a family affair, kids won't feel cheated or punished. Whatever their weight, accept and guide them. This helps them feel good about themselves. Through your support, you can help them adopt healthy habits for a lifetime.

## Quick tips for family health<sup>4,5</sup>

- Eat before you shop for groceries. When you're hungry, you may not make the best choices.
- Serve the right portion per child. Teens have different nutrition needs than young kids.
- Get dinner on the table before your family gets too hungry.
- Try a new, healthy recipe together as a family.
- Replace sodas and sweetened drinks with water or low-fat milk.
- Have everyone help with household chores.
- Make exercise a family routine. For example, plan a Saturday morning walk for the whole family.
- Get active during TV commercials. Challenge your kids to see who can do the most pushups or jumping jacks.
- Play video games that make you move with your kids.

**Don't forget to celebrate your healthy choices as a family, too!**

**Visit [empireblue.com](http://empireblue.com) for more ways to get healthy — and stay healthy.**



**We Can!<sup>TM</sup> (Ways to Enhance Children's Activity and Nutrition) is a one-stop online resource for parents and others looking for family-friendly health tips and ideas. Visit [wecan.nhlbi.nih.gov](http://wecan.nhlbi.nih.gov).**

1 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website: *Childhood Overweight and Obesity* (accessed March 2014): [cdc.gov](http://cdc.gov).

2 National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute website: *Why Obesity is a Health Problem* (accessed March 2014): [nhlbi.nih.gov](http://nhlbi.nih.gov).

3 Office of the Surgeon General website: *Parents and Caregivers Checklist* (accessed March 2014): [surgeongeneral.gov](http://surgeongeneral.gov).

4 National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute website: *Tips for Eating Right* (accessed March 2014): [nhlbi.nih.gov](http://nhlbi.nih.gov).

5 National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute website: *Tips for Getting Active* (accessed March 2014): [nhlbi.nih.gov](http://nhlbi.nih.gov).