Helping children achieve and maintain a healthy weight

With rates of childhood obesity on the rise, it's estimated that in three years, up to half of North American children will be seriously overweight. As kids continue to grow in size, so do adult-sized issues with their mental and physical health. Help the whole family get to a healthy weight—and maintain it—with the tips below.



Get moving. Children need a minimum of one hour of moderate to vigorous exercise daily. While this wasn't a problem when hide-and-seek and hopscotch were the games of choice, many kids today would rather cozy up to a DVD or video game. Encourage kids to get outside and run around. And when it is screen-time, urge them towards active games like interactive tennis, boxing or dance.

Focus on healthy eating. Rather than dieting or making some foods "off limits," offering up healthy, well-rounded meals is key in having a healthy weight. While prefab and take-out meals may be convenient, they're often also loaded with salt, sugar and fat. Invest in a quick-cook, health-conscious cookbook and get kids involved in meal preparation: from selecting the menu, to shopping, to washing vegetables.

Avoid pop at all costs as it's loaded with sugar and calories. Instead, encourage kids to drink plenty of water and watered-down pure fruit juice (even pure fruit juice contains lots of natural sugar).

Be their biggest fan. Whether it's playing in the sandbox or on the football team, be there to cheer your kids on. Attend practices and games whenever you can, and praise your children's efforts. Take pictures of your kids playing outside and hang them on the wall or fridge to reinforce that exercise is fun and rewarding.

Work with your doctor. Calculating a child's Body Mass Index (BMI) is more complicated than it is for adults. The best way to determine whether your child's weight is on track for their age, height and bone structure is to get a pediatrician's assessment. If your child is overweight or obese, work with their pediatrician to create a realistic and holistic plan of action.

Helping children maintain a healthy weight isn't an easy task, especially with all the gadgets and marketing that encourage your kid to stay glued to a screen while gobbling down chips, candy and sugary drinks—all at once. But by being a healthy role model, a creative cook and an enthusiastic cheerleader, you can help your kids stay fit, well-fed and confident.