

Creating Healthy Habits

Healthy eating habits begin early in childhood and continue into the teenage years. Parents and caregivers play important roles as models and to support healthy habits. Make health a family priority and use the tips below to create healthy habits that will last a lifetime:

- Have set times for meals and snacks to prevent skipping meals or grazing.
- Eat meals at the kitchen table, rather than on the couch or in the bedroom. It is hard to focus on your body signals when you watch TV, play on the computer, or do homework while you eat.
- Start the day with a good breakfast. Skipping breakfast can lead to overeating later in the day and poor performance in school, sports, and work.
- Choose at least one food from each category below.
 - Lean protein: low fat milk, yogurt, cottage cheese, eggs, lean lunchmeat, or nut butter
 - High-fiber grain: oatmeal, whole grain cereals or whole wheat breads
 - Fruit or Vegetable: fresh, frozen, dried or canned in 100% juice
- Sit down for a family dinner on most nights. Use this time to talk. Think about starting a tradition, like asking each family member to share the best part of their day.
- Allow children, if able, to serve their own meals. If a child puts too much food on the plate, talk to them about healthy eating and sharing the meal with the whole family.
- Aim for 2 to 4 servings of fruits and 3 to 5 servings of vegetables each day. Limit all juices to 4 ounces (1/2 cup) daily.
- Try new foods as a family. Do not get frustrated by a picky eater. You may need to expose your child to a food 10-20 times or more before they learn to like a food.
- Practice mindful meals and help kids tune into their body signals – eat when hungry and stop when full. **Avoid** the “clean plate club.” Wait 20 minutes before having second helpings. Have your child put down the utensil in between bites.
- Choose to dine-in rather than dining out. When you dine out, order a child-size meal or split an adult meal.
- Aim for 3 servings of high calcium foods daily. Low fat dairy, broccoli, and almonds are good choices.
- **Avoid** excess sugar from drinks like juice, chocolate milk, fruit punch, or soda. Offer water, infused or sparkling water between meals.
- Portion snacks into a bowl or onto a plate instead of eating out of the package.
- Be a smart shopper. Use a grocery list and do not shop when you are hungry. Help kids make healthy choices by having them help with this process. Stock the pantry and fridge with plenty of fresh, unprocessed foods.
- Use verbal praise, stickers, books, crafts or a favorite activity instead of food as rewards.

- **Avoid** too much screen time (TV, computer, video games, cell phone). Limit family screen time to less than 2 hours per day.
- Be active. Aim for 60 minutes per day. Take a walk, ride bikes, swim, dance or play hide and seek.

Who to Call

If you have questions, please contact your provider through MyChart or call your provider listed in your After Visit Summary or After Hospital Care Plan.

For a list of UW Health Clinics, please visit www.uwhealth.org/.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 4/2026. University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Clinical Nutrition Services Department and the Department of Nursing. HF#392