

Trim Kids Plan Tips for Improving Nutrition and Physical Activity at Home and in School

From: Sothorn, M., Schumacher, H., and Von Almen, TK, *Trim Kids: The Proven 12-week Plan that has Helped Thousands of Children Achieve a Healthier Weight* (Harper Collins, 2001, NY, NY); www.lsuhscc.edu

1. **Get them involved.** At the grocery store, skip the soda, cookie and candy aisles and have children select one fruit and vegetable to try each week. At home, include children in lunch and dinner preparation.
2. **Reinstate family traditions.** Insist on family dinners, set the table with real cloth napkins, light candles and play soft music in the background to encourage discussion. Compliment the children on their healthy food selections, cooking and manners. Better yet, invite their friends---they'll be impressed and may want to do the same in their homes.
3. **Take advantage of “teachable” moments.** Select one grocery store aisle each week to spend a few extra minutes reading labels with your children. That “juice” drink may have more calories and sugar than the soda---point this out and encourage healthier choices like low fat milk, veggie juice or sparkling water. Do the same on the cereal aisle---low fat does not always mean low calorie or low sugar. A simple rule is <15 grams of sugar per serving.
4. **Establish portion control.** Serve children an appropriate portion size (usually ½ cup) of each food prepared. Children will eat more if you serve them more. Teach children that it's ok to leave food on their plate so they will learn to self-regulate and not over eat.
5. **Set a “food bedtime.”** After 8:00 p.m. is too late for kids to eat. Discourage snacking after dinner so children will be hungry when they wake up. Plan a healthy breakfast the night before.
6. **Location, location, location.** Discourage eating in front of the TV or computer and gradually restrict all eating and drinking (except water) to the kitchen counter, table or dining room.
7. **Substitute.** Try baked instead of fried chips; or try frozen yogurt instead of ice cream. Choose low fat milk over whole. To make the change easier; mix whole milk with 2% the first week, then 1% and so on.
8. **Re-direct and give choices.** When your child selects an unhealthy snack, re-direct and give choices, “Do you want strawberries, carrots or melon for your snack?” Notice cookies are not in the list of choices. When your child is “vegging out” in front of the TV ask, “Would you like to go outside and play, vacuum the house, or tidy your room? If you let him, he will play!
9. **Activity helps them focus.** Let children do something active and fun when they get home from school, *before homework*, like riding bikes, walking the dog, skateboarding or playing tag with friends. Afterwards they'll concentrate better on their studies.
10. **Have fun inside the home.** Create a physical activity center with safe, indoor active toys and games in the corner of the family room. Call it an “imagination station” and include scarves, hats, and old dress up clothes, for example. Replace the bedroom TV and hand-held computer games with interactive games such as Dance, Dance, Revolution or Wii Fit.
11. **Encourage activity.** Let your children try a variety of activities such as sports, dance, martial arts or swimming through a safe and encouraging program. They'll also make friends with other active kids. Also let young children safely climb, run and jump to help develop muscle strength and bone density.
12. **Take breaks.** Insist that your children take a 5-minute break every 30 minutes of TV, computer and even homework. Encourage teachers to implement the same rule in the classroom to keep children alert.

13. **Realize their limitations.** Young children are best suited for short bursts of intermittent active play—like tag--- so be careful not to impose adult exercise goals, programs or equipment.
14. **Be a role model.** Active parents have active children. Increase weekend physical activity by dedicating at least one-half day to outdoor family fun. Fill a tub with balls, jump ropes, racquets and other items that encourage yard games. Go for a family bike ride, inline skate at the park, hike or spend time together flying kites. Participate with and encourage your children in school fitness functions such as fun-runs, skating parties, and field days.
15. **Get involved.** Attend school parent-teacher association meetings and lobby for more healthy options in vending machines and school lunches, and for increased physical education classes and active outdoor playtime, such as recess twice instead of once a day.
16. **Show off your nutritional knowledge.** When it's your turn to bring the class snack, try fresh fruit with low fat yogurt dip, air-popped popcorn, flavored rice cakes or cut up veggies with low fat salad dressing, low fat cream cheese or peanut butter. On pizza day, deliver a home-aid veggie version with whole wheat crust and low fat cheese.

The bottom line: Stop the nagging. Don't draw attention to negative behaviors. Rather, spend your energy praising your children when they choose healthy foods or physical activity, and ensure the environment sets them up for success.

Go to www.lsuhs.edu for more information.