

Where **kids** come first

Let's get  
active!



Tips to help your child maintain  
a healthy weight by eating well,  
getting more physical activity  
and sleeping better.

Hôpital de Montréal  
pour enfants

Centre universitaire  
de santé McGill



Montreal Children's  
Hospital

McGill University  
Health Centre

# Know the facts!

- More than one in four children and youth in Canada are overweight or obese.
- Many overweight and obese children become obese adults.
- Obesity tends to run in the family. It is partly genetic but largely linked to lifestyle habits (poor food choices, little or no physical activity, poor sleep habits, etc.)
- Childhood obesity increases your child's risk of developing diseases such as:
  - Type 2 diabetes
  - Gallstones
  - High blood pressure and heart disease
  - Joint problems
  - Sleep problems (sleep apnea)
  - Psychological problems (low self-esteem, depression, anxiety)
  - Asthma

# Body Mass Index (BMI)

## What is BMI?

BMI is a measure of body fat. It is based on a child's weight in relation to his height. A doctor should regularly plot a child's BMI on a growth curve, taking into account his age and gender.

As your child grows, the BMI is a good way to assess if he is maintaining a healthy weight.

## Why is BMI important?

By measuring a child's BMI and monitoring his physical activity, nutrition, and sleeping habits throughout childhood and adolescence, parents and doctors can recognize when the child is at risk of becoming overweight or obese. You and your child can then make changes early to control weight gain and to prevent future complications.

# Recommendations for healthy active living are as easy as **5-2-1-0**

- 5** Eat **five** servings of fruits and vegetables a day.
- 2** Limit screen time (television, computer, video games) to less than **two** hours per day.
- 1** Aim for at least **one** hour of moderate to vigorous physical activity daily.
- 0** **Limit or avoid** sugar-sweetened drinks such as soft drinks, sport drinks and sugar-sweetened juices.

Parents are role models for their children; healthy lifestyle habits start with you!



# Tips for your family

## Healthy diet choices

- Eat vegetables and/or fruits at every meal and snack.
- Buy fish and lean meats, such as chicken and beef. Grill or roast meat to reduce fat.
- Eat low-fat dairy products like yogurt, milk, and cheese. For example, switch from 3.25% milk to 2% or 1% milk.

**Remember, as a parent, you control what you buy and what food is available at home.**



- Drink water or milk instead of juice, sugar-sweetened drinks or sport drinks.
- Eat a piece of fruit or vegetable rather than drinking fruit or vegetable juice.
- If you do drink juice, choose 100% pure fruit juice with no added sugar. (Maximum of five ounces or 150 ml per day for children under six years of age, and 12 ounces or 360 ml per day for children six years of age and older).
- Choose vegetable oils such as olive, canola, and soy bean oil instead of butter, margarine, lard and shortening.
- Include high fibre and whole grain foods such as sweet potatoes, brown rice, whole wheat pasta, peas, and bran cereal in your diet.
- Learn how to read food labels. This will help you make better choices.

## Healthy eating habits

- Eat breakfast every day.
- Don't skip meals.
- Prepare and eat meals at home, as a family.
- Limit fast food, take-out food, and eating at restaurants.
- Avoid keeping sugar-sweetened beverages, candies, and high-sugar snacks in your home.

## Improving physical activity

- Make 60 minutes of moderate physical activity part of your family's daily routine
- Encourage your child to do at least 3 days per week of vigorous-intensity activities like biking and running, and activities that strengthen muscles and bones like jumping, shovelling snow or carrying groceries.
- Encourage your child to join a sports team or playgroup to take part in organized and unorganized physical activities.
- Check out your community centre to find out what sports and activities are offered.
- Play outdoors and enjoy public parks, bike paths and soccer/basketball/tennis courts.
- Walk or ride your bike to work, school, the mall, or the park.
- Put on some music and dance.
- Use the stairs instead of the elevator.

**Developing healthy lifestyle habits can be a fun experience for the entire family!**



## Decreasing sedentary lifestyle

- Set clear time limits for screen time (television, computer, video games, cell phones) to less than two hours per day for children older than two years of age, and no screen time for children younger than two years old.
- Turn off the television while eating.
- Keep televisions, video games, cell phones and computers out of your child's bedroom.
- Limit time spent in cars and buses, extended sitting and time spent indoors.

**Healthy lifestyle habits are key to preventing and treating obesity.**

## Improve your child's sleep routine

Developing a sleep routine can improve sleep quality and quantity. This will help your child stay healthy and maintain a good weight. For example:

- Going to bed at the same time and getting up at the same time.
- Sleeping every night in the same environment that is quiet, calm and dark.
- Computers, cell phones and other electronic devices should not be used before bedtime. Ideally, they should be turned off and should not be kept in the bedroom.



## Helpful hints...

- Encourage and support your child as he gradually adopts healthier lifestyle habits.
- Offer your child many different options of physical activities and let him choose.
- Set reasonable goals with your child and incorporate changes slowly. You don't have to make your desired changes all at once.
- Before making any major changes in your child's eating habits or physical activity, talk with a doctor.

**The best and the easiest time to adopt a healthy lifestyle is during childhood!**



**Residents for Healthy Active Living in Youth**

THIS BROCHURE WAS CREATED AS PART OF THE RHALY PROJECT.

**What is RHALY:**  
"Residents for Healthy Active Living in Youth"

RHALY is an advocacy project initiated by the pediatric residents at The Montreal Children's Hospital of the McGill University Health Centre. Our goal is to increase the awareness of childhood obesity and to promote healthy active living. Ultimately, we aim to help children maintain healthy weight by increasing physical activity, eating better and developing healthy sleep habits.



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