

# Health eNews



## Obesity in Children

It's a fact: more and more children in the United States are becoming overweight and obese. Because of this problem, the American Heart Association (AHA) updated the Dietary Recommendations for Children and Adolescents. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) agrees with these recommendations.

### Diet and Exercise

Kids are eating unbalanced meals made up of high-calorie foods, and they aren't exercising enough. Children can easily get their hands on junk food, candy and fried foods, and these poor eating habits follow them into adulthood. Instead of playing outdoor sports, kids are watching TV or playing computer games.

As a result, an alarming number of children are gaining weight and developing weight-related health problems as young adults. Common problems include heart disease, diabetes, high cholesterol and high blood pressure. The AHA reports that 75 percent to 90 percent of heart disease cases are related to these problems. Heart disease is the number one killer in the United States.

### Based on Studies

Studies show that heart disease begins in childhood. Young people don't usually think about what they're eating and how it might affect their health, but this attitude needs to change.

The AHA urges children to eat more fruits and vegetables, whole grains, low-fat dairy products, fish and lean meats. They also suggest less time in front of the TV or computer screen and more time exercising and playing sports.

### Specific Recommendations by the AHA:

- Drink fewer sugar-sweetened drinks.
- Use unsaturated oils (like canola or corn oil) instead of solid fats (like butter or margarine) when cooking.
- Use the portion sizes recommended on labels when serving food.
- Serve vegetables and fruits at every meal.
- Eat fish twice a week.
- Remove the skin before eating chicken or turkey.
- Use lean cuts of meat and reduced-fat meat.
- Limit high-calorie sauces.
- Eat more whole-grain breads and cereals.
- Eat more beans and tofu and less meat.
- Choose high-fiber, low-salt, low-sugar substitutes.
- Balance dietary calories with physical activity.
- Engage in physical activity for 60 minutes daily.
- Limit TV and computer time to less than two hours per day.
- Use non-fat (skim) or low-fat milk and dairy products daily.

### Healthier People

Children need help deciding which foods to choose, how many calories to take in and how much physical activity they need. If the entire family works together within these guidelines, we can hope for healthier children who will in-turn, become healthier adults.



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## How to Increase Your Family's Physical Fitness

Exercise is essential to good health and fitness, and studies also have demonstrated that exercise contributes to overall happiness by improving our mood. In spite of the known benefits of exercise, physical inactivity has become a serious problem for adults and children alike in the United States.

Many adults and children today are victims of the age of automation. We are driven to and from work and school. Once we arrive at our destination, we spend the majority of the day sitting at a desk, engaged in activities that may work our mind but do little to keep our bodies fit. At the end of the work or school day, we arrive home only to spend more hours sitting in front of the television or computer. In addition to not getting enough exercise, we tend to consume high calorie, high fat, nutritionally lacking snacks during our periods of inactivity.

Current recommendations state that children and adults should strive for at least 30 minutes daily of moderate intensity exercise. This goal can be met through a wide range of family activities that not only will provide exercise but enjoyment as well. Parents need to become role models for their children at an early age. If your children see that you are physically active and having fun while you exercise, they are more likely to be active and stay active later in their lives.

Here are some simple ways to increase your family's level of physical activity:

- Plan a family hike through a scenic park. If you announce to your children that everyone in the family will be required to take a 2-mile walk on Saturday, chances are good that your idea will be met with resistance. However, if you turn the walk into a family outing and allow your children to participate in the planning, your children will be more likely to cooperate.
- Challenge your children to a basketball, volleyball, tennis or baseball game. Children like the idea of competing against adults. They are likely to have fun, and, at the same time, everyone physically benefits from this activity. This also promotes being active at any age.
- Join a community center that offers fitness and recreational programs. Check out your local YMCA or department of recreation. Many of these organizations offer community sports, and some also have swimming pools, skating rinks and fitness centers that the entire family can enjoy.
- If your child is involved in organized sports, offer to help out. Coaching is not the only way to get involved in your child's sports program. Offer to help at the concession stand or transport children to and from games. If you stay involved in your children's activities, chances are greater that they also will wish to remain involved.
- Emphasize fitness and fun, rather than competition and perfection. Not every child is going to be a great athlete. When children are made to feel inferior, they tend to withdraw from organized sporting activities.
- When picking indoor activities, select those that will offer some type of physical activity. Bowling, skating or touring a museum are better choices than seeing a movie.
- Allow your children to include their friends when you are planning your exercise activities. Establishing friendships and forming peer groups are of vital importance to your children. Your children will be more likely to want to participate in activities that include their friends.
- Discuss ways that everyone can be more active in daily life. Take the stairs instead of the elevator. Park farther away from mall entrances. Take a short walk after dinner. Don't drive somewhere that you can easily walk.
- Limit the amount of time that is spent watching television and playing video and computer games. Allow your child to select one or two favorite programs and do not leave the television turned on continuously. (Studies show that the average American child spends about 24 hours each week watching television.) Bargain with your children. For every hour of television they watch, get a commitment for equal time engaged in physical activity.
- Try not to take away physical activities as punishment for your child. Exercise promotes good health and is needed on a daily basis. If necessary, withhold other activities that will not interfere with your child's need for physical activity.
- Don't stifle informal play. While organized team sports have value, encourage your children to "play" often. Some of the



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best ways to promote fitness and creativity are through playing outside with friends. Openly support physical education and recess at your child's school. With so much emphasis on classroom learning, physical education time is constantly fighting the chopping block of school budgets.

## Children and Cholesterol

### Are kids at risk?

#### Controlling cholesterol begins in childhood.

Evidence shows atherosclerosis (fatty deposits of plaque in artery walls) begins in childhood and progresses slowly into adulthood. Then the condition often leads to coronary heart disease (CHD), the single largest cause of death in the United States. Other evidence says:

- Elevated cholesterol levels early in life may play a role in the development of atherosclerosis in adults.
- Eating patterns and genetics affect blood cholesterol levels and CHD risk.
- Lowering levels in children and adolescents may be beneficial.

Many studies show high blood cholesterol levels play a role in developing coronary heart disease (CHD) in adults. Research has also shown fatty buildup in arteries begins in childhood and is more likely with higher blood cholesterol levels.

### Who should be tested?

Most children don't need to have their blood cholesterol checked. Those who should be tested at age 2 or older include children with:

- At least one parent with high cholesterol (240 mg/dL or greater); or
- A family history of early heart disease (a male parent or grandparent with CHD before age 55 or a female parent or grandparent with CHD before age 65)
- Diabetes
- Obesity

In some cases, a doctor may recommend screening a child's cholesterol level even without these conditions, especially if the child has other risk factors.

Cholesterol levels for children are not evaluated by the same criteria as those for adults. According to the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute of the National Institutes of Health, the following cholesterol levels apply for children between 2 to 19 years old.

	Desirable	Borderline	Associated with Higher Risk
Total Cholesterol	Less than 170	170-199	200 or more



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<b>LDL Cholesterol</b>	Less than 110	110-129	130 or more
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If you think your child may be at higher risk, talk to your child's doctor about your concerns and whether an evaluation is needed. Your child's doctor is your best source for recommendations on how to guide your child toward a heart-healthy adult life.

## Don't restrict cholesterol in babies and toddlers

Fats and cholesterol are important for normal growth and development in young children. Very young children (from infants old enough to eat solids up to about age 4) who are physically normal and healthy should not have their diet influenced by adult concerns about foods containing fats and cholesterol. Depriving children of adequate amounts of these substances can hurt them.

Once they are old enough to eat solids, young children should be given healthy foods such as whole milk that provide fats as nutrients. But children shouldn't be eating french fries every day.

See your pediatrician and ask questions if you have any concerns about the appropriate diet for your child.

## Older children and cholesterol

Older children from about 4 or 5 should be transitioned to heart-healthy foods such as nonfat or low-fat milk. A healthy diet plus a healthy level of physical activity is most likely to give them a good start in life and minimize the risk of CHD.

## What to Do About Your Cholesterol

### Read the basics on cholesterol and how to lower it.

Here's the story about the good, the bad, and the "other" types of cholesterol.

**HDL is the good type.** HDL cholesterol, or high-density lipoproteins, protects against heart disease, so it's commonly known as "good" cholesterol. Higher numbers are better.

**LDL is the bad type.** LDL cholesterol, or low-density lipoproteins, increases your risk for heart disease. Too much LDL cholesterol in your blood can build up on the inside walls of your arteries. Over time, the buildup, called plaque, can narrow the space for blood to flow through. Plaque can then break off, causing life-threatening clots that block the blood flow. This can happen in the arteries everywhere in the body but is most dangerous in the arteries that feed the heart, brain, and other vital organs.

**Triglycerides.** One of the other types of fat that circulates in the blood is called triglycerides. A high level of triglycerides can also raise heart disease risk. Levels that are borderline high (150 to 199 mg/dL) or high (200 mg/dL or higher) may need treatment in some people.

### Charting the numbers

Cholesterol levels are measured in milligrams (mg) of cholesterol per deciliter (dL) of blood.

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Total Cholesterol Level	Category
Less than 200 mg/dL	Desirable
200-239 mg/dL	Borderline high
240 mg/dL and above	High

HDL Cholesterol Level	Category
<40 mg/dL	Low
>60 mg/dL	High

LDL Cholesterol Level	LDL-Cholesterol Category
Less than 100 mg/dL	Optimal
100-129 mg/dL	Near optimal/above optimal
130-159 mg/dL	Borderline high
160-189 mg/dL	High
190 mg/dL and above	Very high

Perhaps you've been told your cholesterol is too high. Or maybe you'd just like to keep it at a healthy level to lower your risk of



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heart disease as much as possible. What level is best for you in part depends on any other health conditions that you may have. Always follow your doctor's orders for treatment. Plus, think about what kind of lifestyle habits will help you reach your cholesterol goals.

## Change your eating habits

You can do it! Part of the solution toward lowering your cholesterol and cutting your risk of heart disease is to eat less high-fat, high-cholesterol foods. Your doctor may suggest a specific diet for you. Otherwise, this is how you can follow a heart-healthy diet:

- **Choose foods low in saturated fat.** Saturated fat boosts your cholesterol level more than anything else in your diet. Foods from animals are highest in saturated fat. They include fatty cuts of meat, chicken, or other poultry with skin, whole milk, and whole-milk dairy products, lard, and some vegetable oils like coconut oil, palm kernel oil, and palm oils.
- **Choose lean proteins.** These can take the place of fatty meats and cheeses. Choose fish, skinless poultry, lean meats, dry beans, limited eggs, and nuts. Choose low-fat or fat-free dairy products.
- **Choose foods low in total fat.** Low fat choices can also help you lose weight, if needed, and lower your cholesterol. The right fats can actually be good for you. Certain polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats can make up to 35 percent of your total calories. Use them to replace saturated and trans fats. Use olive or canola oil for cooking and baking.
- **Choose foods high in fiber.** This includes fruits and vegetables, whole grains such as whole wheat, oatmeal, brown and wild rice, barley, buckwheat, bulgur, and quinoa. Add in some beans or legumes, such as split peas and lentils, pinto, navy, kidney, black, and garbanzo beans. Beans are rich in lean protein, too.
- **Choose foods low in cholesterol.** Cholesterol is in foods from animals. Replace animal foods with healthy plant-based foods.

## Be more physically active

Physical activity increases HDL cholesterol (the good kind) and lowers triglycerides and LDL cholesterol (the bad kind). Physical activity can help you lower your blood pressure, lose weight, reduce your stress, and improve your overall fitness, including that of your heart and blood vessels. But always check with your doctor before you increase your activity level.

## Lose weight if needed

Being overweight means that you probably have higher blood levels of cholesterol and triglycerides than you otherwise would. This places you at higher risk for heart disease. If you are overweight, losing even a little weight can help lower LDL cholesterol and triglycerides and raise HDL cholesterol.

## Stop smoking if you smoke

Don't smoke and avoid secondhand smoke. Smoking increases your risk for heart disease, stroke, heart attack, and cancer.

## Cholesterol-lowering drugs

If lifestyle changes are not enough to control cholesterol, your doctor may prescribe cholesterol-lowering medications in addition to eating a heart healthy diet and increasing physical activity.

## Combating Cholesterol: Fight it With Food

**Adding certain foods to your diet may actually help to lower your cholesterol and decrease your risk for heart disease.**

You know the rules. Eat less red meat, cheese and butter. Limit fried foods. Avoid trans fats. With so many things to cut out,



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what's left to eat?

While heart-healthy eating includes lots of "no's," there are plenty of delicious foods you *can* eat without guilt. What's more, adding certain foods to your diet may actually help to lower your cholesterol and decrease your risk for heart disease.

Unless you have a strong family history of high cholesterol, changing your diet is often enough to lower cholesterol to a healthy level. The key? You need to work certain foods into your diet - not just once in a while, but every day.

So get your shopping list ready! The foods listed below have a high soluble fiber content (and rich nutrients), or a healthy fat ratio. Soluble fiber binds with cholesterol, helping to remove it from the body. Certain fats, when replacing saturated and trans fats, can help lower cholesterol levels.

## **Oatmeal (and oat bran)**

- Take a half-cup of old-fashioned oats and add a couple of tablespoons of oat bran, some skim or soy milk (instead of water) and a sprinkle of ground flaxseeds.
- Add a small handful of walnuts, sliced banana or chopped apple and a teaspoon of maple syrup for a touch of sweetness.

## **Carrots/yams/sweet potatoes**

- Blend with chicken broth and sautéed onions for a creamy low-fat soup.
- Bake or mash, then add trans-fat-free margarine and cinnamon.
- Roast with onions and parsnips.

## **Brussels sprouts**

- Sauté with leeks and garlic.
- Bake in a casserole with brown rice and shredded low-fat cheese.
- Roast with onions and add a dash of grated Parmesan.

## **Dried apricots/prunes**

- Mix with nuts for a quick afternoon snack.
- Chop into cereal.
- Dice and add to chicken salad.

## **Berries**

- Blend fresh or frozen into smoothies.
- Add to cold cereal.
- Top with low-fat sour cream or yogurt.
- Add to low-fat cottage cheese and top with sesame seeds or nuts.

## **Apples and pears**

- Slice and eat with a smear of natural peanut butter.
- Chop and add to tuna salad.
- Bake and eat for dessert with a sprinkle of walnuts and cinnamon.



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## Beans/legumes

- Add chickpeas or kidney beans to your salad.
- Make a hearty split pea soup.
- Enjoy a lentil curry.
- Mix pinto beans and brown rice with onions and stewed tomatoes.

## Olive oil

- Use as a base for salad dressing with lemon or lime juice, garlic, salt and pepper.
- Use to sauté your favorite vegetables.
- Add to diced potatoes and roast with fresh pepper, onion and garlic powder.

## Avocado

- Spread onto toasted whole-grain bread and top with sliced tomato.
- Mash for guacamole.
- Chop into salads.
- Slice and add to a turkey sandwich instead of mayo.

## Walnuts and almonds

- Bake into quickbreads.
- Add to cold or hot cereal.
- Eat a handful with a piece of fruit for an afternoon snack.
- Chop and sprinkle on a whole-wheat English muffin with light cream cheese.

## Salmon and other fatty fish

- Bake with a topping of low-fat sour cream, mustard and dill.
- Add cold fish to a mixed green salad.
- Make salmon cakes with fresh or canned salmon.

## Flaxseeds (ground) and psyllium seeds

- Blend into smoothies.
- Mix into hot/cold cereal.
- Use as a topping for yogurt.

No one food or supplement can work miracles, but upping your intake of nutritious foods can make a big difference in your cholesterol level. However, remember that any successful strategy must combine healthy eating, diligent exercise and stress reduction.

## Kid Fit: Helping Kids Win at Fitness

### Kids and fitness





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Obesity is fast becoming a serious health problem facing children today. Consider these statistics:

- Obesity in children and adolescents has more than doubled in the past 30 years.
- More than one in four U.S. children are overweight, and 15 percent of them are very overweight or obese.

Researchers have already established that an adolescent who is now overweight runs a 70 percent risk of becoming an obese adult. It is a known fact that obesity in adulthood increases the chance that you will develop serious health problems such as high blood pressure, diabetes and heart disease. Physicians are encountering an increasing number of adolescents and young adults who have already developed these serious health problems.

## Two Biggest Factors in Childhood Obesity

1. Decline in physical activity
2. Increased consumption of higher calorie, higher fat content foods such as fast foods and poor-choice snacks

