

# Investing in Your Family

The moment you leave the hospital holding your first baby, you are conscious of a new and momentous set of responsibilities. For quite a while, your child will depend on you for every need, and even after they leave the home, they will take with them many of the values, lessons, and habits that you pass down. Health is certainly near the top of the list of a parent's responsibilities; giving children the right nutrition and exercise during their developmental years sets the foundation for a long, happy life.

## An Investment

Keeping your family healthy is not easy, and it is not free. But it is an investment in the future, and the harder you work at it, the bigger the rewards will be. If you grew up in a health-conscious home, it might be a smooth transition to prioritize proper nutrition and activity in your own family. But if you have old habits that are less than healthy, things will be a little more difficult. Not only do you have to lead your family toward a healthy lifestyle, but you also have to convince your own body and mind to do things differently in the first place.

Children learn from example, and if they see that nutrition is not important to you, they will probably not give it much thought either. On the other hand, seeing their parents make dramatic changes in their own lifestyle helps children realize just how important healthy living is.



## LEARN MORE

Make smart decisions about your health and visit a physician or health specialist for advice and questions.

**American Society for Nutrition**

[www.nutrition.org](http://www.nutrition.org)

**CDC Physical Activity**

[www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity](http://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity)

# BUILDING HEALTHIER FAMILIES



Setting healthy standards for children starts with the best role model:  
Parents



**HEALTHY DIRECTIONS**

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**HEALTHY DIRECTIONS**



## Benefits for Kids

Children who develop an appetite for healthy, natural foods and learn to love outdoor activities will carry those preferences into adulthood. Help your children avoid the growing epidemic of childhood obesity and you will give them a huge advantage when they take charge of their own health down the road. Kids who get all the nutrition they need while their bodies are developing will grow into adults who have less risk of heart disease, diabetes, respiratory illness, and even simple viruses.

## Benefits for Parents

Don't build a healthy family just for your kids' sakes— do it for yourself! Your healthy choices now have a direct effect on the kind of life you will lead as a senior. If you hope to continue enjoying vigorous activities with your children and grandchildren long into your senior years, it is essential that you reinforce your body now with good food and consistent exercise.

## Strengthen Family Bonds

The benefits of working together as a family to stay healthy are not purely physical. Experts tell us that the more families do together, the stronger the bonds are between members. Taking on the challenge to transform your diet could pull your family closer together, and you could learn a lot about each other that you didn't know. Spending time outdoors on vacation or a summer evening encourages closeness, and there is nothing like the feeling of accomplishing a significant fitness goal together. Self-confidence, self-control, and an example of strong family leadership are just some of the other qualities that you can communicate through a family health program.

One-on-one activities between a parent and a child are also good opportunities to create ideal environments for conversation. Jogging or biking with your child during the difficult teenage years can be very important times of encouragement. Quality time together helps strengthen communication and closeness.

## Diet

How exactly can you lead your family toward good health? The starting line for most families is the dining room table.

## Meals at Home

Hectic schedules make it difficult for many families to enjoy meals together at home. This is not ideal, because much of the food that is readily available outside the home is unhealthy. Set clear expectations for meal times and be consistent with those times. Make the most of these opportunities by serving plenty of vegetables and lean meats.

## Snacking

What do your kids see you eat between meals? Set a good example by choosing natural snacks—fruit, vegetables, and nuts, for example—instead of fatty and salty foods. Especially at a young age, kids will take your cue and learn to habitually supplement their diet rather than sabotage it at snack times.

Make sure that there are healthy choices in your kitchen when you need a snack. This takes thinking ahead at the grocery store, passing up cookies, and stocking up on better options. Simply removing temptation is often the key to encouraging healthy eating!

## Meals Outside the Home

Your family eats more than the food you bring home from the grocery store. Know what your kids eat each day at school, at friends' houses, and at restaurants. Incorporate those meals into your planning so that you can make sure everyone is getting a balanced diet each day. As a parent, make sure you are not slacking off when your kids aren't watching— follow the same guidelines at work as you do at home.

## Exercise

Exercising as a family takes real planning. All family members need to make it a priority, passing on invitations by friends and sacrificing screen time. It is unrealistic to expect each member of the family to take responsibility to exercise on their own, and working out as a group is more fun anyway!

Exercising should be fun. The human body naturally wants to exert itself, and inactivity makes it resistant to exercise. Hikes in the



woods, football games, bike rides, boat trips, and swimming can be sources for exercise and great lifelong memories.

If your family is working to get out of a rut of inactivity, it can help to set goals and initiate some competition. Be creative and offer rewards for the family member who is able to reach fitness goals first. Push each other to do better, and before long you will have a family that is healthy, happy, and excited to face whatever the next day holds as a team.

## The Whole Picture

Once a good diet and exercise become a vital part of your routines, overall wellness will become a part of your family life as well. Not only will health improve communication, support and relationships will be strengthened through a healthy lifestyle.



**Meal times should be a priority on the family schedule.  
Besides bonding, it is a way to make sure meals are nutritious.**