

Healthwatch: Influence Your Child's Good Health

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Raising children is one of the most joyful, yet challenging tasks we are blessed with. Initially parenting focuses on ensuring that our child's physical and emotional needs are met. But by the time children are toddlers they begin to mimic our behaviors, and then parenting gets much more complicated. Children mimic not only speech and mannerism, but lifestyle behaviors as well. Thus, parents probably have the greatest influence on their child's health as well as their future health behaviors. The *Center for Disease Control* (www.cdc.gov/Features/ChildHealth/) has outlined the following important reminders to help us set a good example for our children.

Eat Right. A healthy diet has been shown to be of utmost importance in maintaining good health. That means eating fruits and vegetables everyday. If you pass over the vegetables, or fail to provide them regularly, don't expect your child to develop a taste for them. "The apple doesn't fall far from the tree!"—picky parents usually raise picky children. On the other hand, most children whose parents eat a variety of foods, will learn to like a variety of foods over time.

- Keep a bowl of fresh fruit on your kitchen counter. Have cut up veggies, cheese sticks, or yogurt in the refrigerator for quick snacking.
- Place a box of raisins or other dried fruit in your child's backpack, in your purse or your car as a quick snack when you're on the go.
- Add strawberries, blueberries or bananas to your cereal, oatmeal or toast.
- Keep sodas or other sweet beverages to a minimum.

Be Physically Active. Physical exercise is important at any age. Children will be more likely to make exercise a regular part of their routine as adults if their parents have set the example with an active lifestyle.

- Encourage your children to be active for at least one hour a day.
- Set a positive example by leading an active lifestyle yourself.
- Take family walks or play active games together.

Take Care of Your Teeth: Tooth decay is largely preventable and poor oral health has been found to have links to other aspects of physical health.

- Use fluoride toothpaste, brush for 2 minutes, twice daily and teach them to floss daily.
- Drink fluoridated water when available.
- Schedule regular dental exams for your family.

Avoid Tobacco Use: Avoiding tobacco use will reduce the chance that your children will grow up using tobacco themselves. The dangers of second-hand smoke have been well documented. Children who are regularly exposed to second hand smoke have more problems with asthma, allergies and ear infections as well as lung diseases in adulthood. Eliminating indoor smoking is the only way to protect nonsmokers from exposure.

- If you use tobacco, free quit support is available at 1-800-QUITNOW (1-800-784-8669).
- Don't allow smoking in your home or car.
- Talk to your kids about avoiding tobacco use.

Remember that our actions speak louder than words!

