



# Smart Food Choices

## Balancing Food & Physical Activity from a Family Perspective

Fact Sheet FS1060



## Cooperative Extension

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY HEALTH SCIENCES

*Karen Ensle EdD, RD, FADA, CFCS; Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Union County*

### How to Calculate Your Child's Body Mass Index (BMI)

**Get Kids in Action:** [www.getkidsinaction.org](http://www.getkidsinaction.org).

A partnership between The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and The Gatorade Company, Get Kids in Action aims to increase physical activity among children in order to reduce and prevent obesity. They have information for parents and kids on obesity, a BMI calculator, suggestions for activities, and healthy eating tips.

**U. S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) / Children's Nutrition Research Center at Baylor College of Medicine:** [www.kidsnutrition.org](http://www.kidsnutrition.org). The Children's Nutrition Research Center is dedicated to defining the nutrient needs of children, from conception through adolescence, and the needs of pregnant women and nursing mothers. The website includes a BMI calculator, kids' energy needs calculator, and daily requirements for nutrients in children based on their age.

### Healthy Tips for Your Family

Parents are busy people and often worry about getting "quick food" that their family enjoys rather than thinking about purchasing and/or preparing healthy food. It takes planning ahead to make sure your family is eating a nutritious, balanced diet. Here are some suggestions for easy ways to make healthy eating a way of life for your family.

1. Eat meals together on a regular basis.  
Eating healthy foods together as a family will help your children learn healthy eating habits. Regular family meals also give you a chance to check in with each other.
  - Make cooking and food preparation a team effort. Shop, cook and plan meals together.
  - Try eating one meal a day together.
  - Try healthy, ready-to-eat foods from a store or restaurant if time is an issue.
2. Eat breakfast.  
Studies show that kids learn better if they eat breakfast.
  - Start the night before; mix juice, get breakfast foods ready, and set the table.
  - Offer quick and easy foods such as low-fat granola bars, fruit, and yogurt.
3. Make healthy foods available.  
Stock your refrigerator/shelves with healthy foods.
  - Limit sugary sodas and soft drinks.
  - Try to have at least two fruits or vegetables with every meal.
  - Keep a bowl of fruit on your kitchen table or counter.
  - Wash and cut up fruits and vegetables as soon as you are ready to eat and keep them in the refrigerator, along with a low-fat dip or salsa.

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New Jersey Agricultural  
Experiment Station

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey  
88 Lipman Drive, New Brunswick, NJ 08901-8525  
Phone: 732.932.5000



- Canned and frozen vegetables are often less expensive and have a long shelf-life.
- Serve lean meats (like chicken and turkey) and other good sources of protein (like eggs and fish).
- Choose whole-grain breads and cereals.
- For children over age two, choose 1% or fat free milk rather than whole or 2% milk.

4. Limit fast-food and other low-nutrient foods.

There's no need to ban the chips and candy forever- just make these "once-in-a-while" foods.

- Be a good role model and eat healthy foods.
- Never force your kids to clean their plates. Let them decide when they're full.
- Never use food as a reward for good behavior. Try stickers for younger kids, and physical family outings for older ones- like going to the park, to the zoo, or bowling.

5. Add physical activity everyday and stay active.

Kids need regular physical activity (such as physical education programs in school) because it helps them both physically and mentally. According to the University of Michigan, physical education programs can help children do well in school, improve their self-image, and decrease bad behavior and drug use. In addition to not eating well, kids aren't getting enough exercise to use up all those extra calories. According to a 2010 Kaiser Family Foundation report, 8 to 18-year-olds spend an average of **7.5 hours a day** on media including watching TV, using the computer, playing video games, using cell phones, and texting. Studies have shown that the more TV kids watch, the more likely they are to be overweight. Kids can get exercise by:

- Participating in community activities such as biking, bowling and swimming.

- Joining a team activity such as baseball, soccer, track, volleyball, gymnastics,
- Spending free time being active, by using play grounds, biking, hiking, roller skating, skiing, tennis, and playing kick ball.

**Steps to a Healthier You: The USDA recommends that children get 60 minutes or more of physical activity every day, if possible.**

For more info: <http://njaes.rutgers.edu/fchs/> & <http://www.getmovinggethealthynj.rutgers.edu/>

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