

# fit for the future



Physiotherapists and dietitians help you keep  
your children active and eating healthily





We all want our children to be **healthy** and **happy**. But in a world where life has been made much easier by cars, computers and convenience food, it's hardly surprising that a growing number of today's children risk becoming overweight.

Physiotherapists and dietitians know that many of these children are likely to remain overweight as adults unless they **exercise** and **eat well**. Being overweight can put kids at risk of some serious medical conditions like heart disease, type 2 diabetes and cancer and can put unnecessary stress on their growing bones.

As a parent, carer or teacher, **you can help your children** or pupils enjoy **exercise and healthy food**. This leaflet, produced by the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy and the British Dietetic Association, is packed with **top tips to help you** get your kids **fit for the future**.

## DID YOU KNOW ?

Regular exercise can help improve:

✓ **Concentration** ✓ **Learning skills** ✓ **Self-esteem**

# 60 active minutes

Only one in five parents know how much time children need to spend exercising per day.

Children should aim to be physically active at a moderate intensity for one hour every day. Their heart rate should increase, but conversation should still be possible. It's ok to break activity into easier 15-minute slots throughout the day.

## School days

There are plenty of ways kids can get active during the school day:

- > Walking to and from school is great exercise. If you have concerns about safety, walk with your children and bring younger siblings along on reins as soon as they're walking competently. If time is a problem for working parents, is there a local walk-to-school scheme children can join?
- > Make the walk more fun by telling stories and playing games, like I-spy or spotting different types of car, as you go
- > Give your child a sense of achievement by giving them a pedometer, which measures the number of steps they take
- > If you're a teacher or teaching assistant on duty during break time, tell children about the games you used to play as a child. Show them how to play hopscotch, skipping and tag, for example.



### PHYSIO TIP!

Bad habits are hard to break. The earlier children begin to enjoy regular physical activity and healthy food, the more likely they are to stick with good habits as they grow up!

## GOOD POSTURE

Children generally start off life with good posture. But over the years, bad habits can creep in, leaving children more vulnerable to back pain in later life.

### For better posture:

- > Encourage children to stand like a soldier, or a ballerina, with head up, shoulders back and tummy in
- > 'One size fits all' classroom furniture is not always ideal, but children can sit well by bringing their chair close to the table, sitting back in the seat with their back upright. They should avoid hunching over textbooks and be given the opportunity to move about during long lessons
- > Sturdy rucksacks are safer than 'fashion' bags. They should be packed and worn correctly. Heavier objects should be packed first and the bag should be worn properly using both shoulder straps and the waist belt.

## Up and about

Get kids active after school, at weekends and during holidays. Here are a few tips to help you get the kids away from their DVDs and video games. You can do many of them together with your child.

- > Get a map of your area and plan a weekly walk
- > Teach your child to ride a bike so you can cycle together
- > Go for a swim together
- > Don't just use the park for a picnic, do something active too. Throw a frisbee, fly a kite, or kick a ball around
- > Enter your family in an event like a fun-run or bike ride. Working together is rewarding and great motivation
- > If your child shows an interest in televised sport, see if you can sign them up to a local club where they can try it
- > Walk to the shops, or park further away if you have to drive. Take the stairs, rather than the lift or escalator, and ask for a little help with the shopping bags!

### When the weather puts a dampener on things, get active indoors.

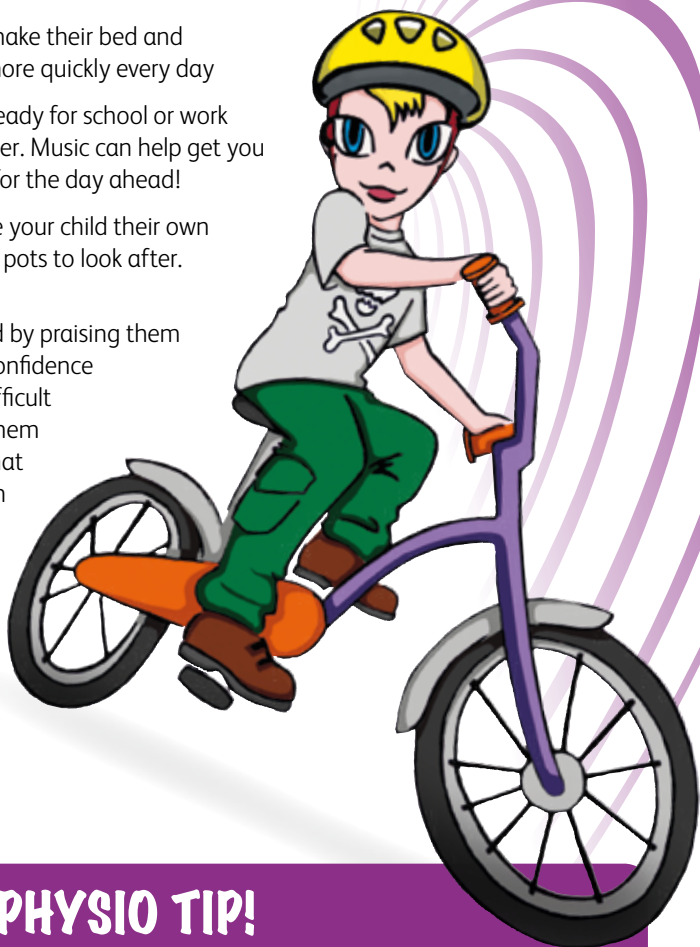
- > Interactive sport video games are a fun way of getting active. If your child has a traditional console, set them a physical challenge each time they progress from one level to another – a set of star jumps, for example
- > Play hide and seek or show your child how to use a hula hoop.



# A helping hand at home

- Explain to your child that you'll have more 'fun' time together if they help you out with chores
- Teach your child how to make their bed and challenge them to do it more quickly every day
- Put music on as you get ready for school or work and dance around together. Music can help get you in a good frame of mind for the day ahead!
- If you have a garden, give your child their own area or a couple of flower pots to look after.

Keep your child motivated by praising them for being active. If their confidence has been knocked by a difficult activity or sport, remind them that it's the taking part that is important and ask them about other forms of exercise they'd like to try out.



## PHYSIO TIP!

Wearing the right clothing and footwear during exercise is very important and can help your child avoid injury. Sensible trainers are a must, as is clothing that gives them the freedom to bend, stretch and jump. Children should spend a few minutes warming up and cooling down with some light activity to help their body get used to starting or stopping exercise.

# Healthy eating

The more active a child is, the higher their need for energy from food. A healthy diet for children is about balance and variety.

## Fruit and vegetables:

All children should eat at least five portions of fruit and vegetables every day. They contain minerals, vitamins, antioxidants, fibre, natural sugars for energy and water to help top up hydration levels. Go for variety and different colours to get a wider range of nutrients.

## Bread, rice, potatoes, pasta and other starchy foods:

Include foods from this group in every meal for energy. Wholegrain varieties are best – they contain all the goodness of the grain and are a good source of minerals, vitamins and fibre.

## Milk and dairy foods:

Children need two to three portions of milk and dairy foods such as yoghurt, fromage frais and cheese each day for strong bones and teeth. Low fat varieties have just as much calcium and protein.

## Meat, fish, eggs, beans:

Include two to three portions a day for growth and repair. Choose lean meat and at least two portions of fish a week – fish is a good source of protein, vitamins and minerals and is low in saturated fat.

## Cut back fat and sugar swap:

Fat-rich foods such as butter, spreading fats, cooking oils and salad dressings should only be used in small amounts.

Choose lower fat alternatives when you can. Aim to have crisps, biscuits, fizzy drinks and sweets as occasional treats. There are many easy things you can do to help children to enjoy food and to have a healthy diet.

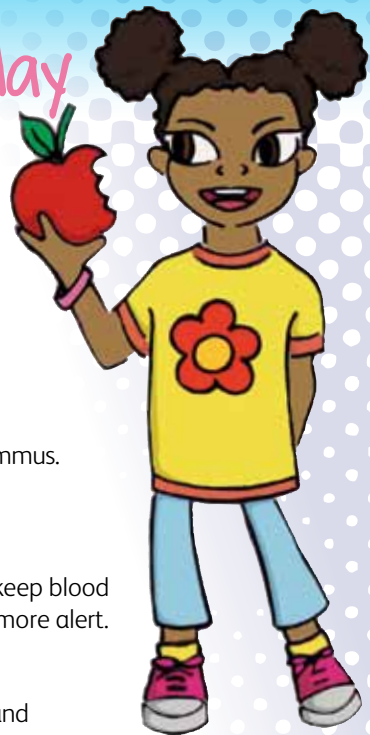
- > Eating meals together as a family encourages children to enjoy a variety of foods
- > Regular meals and healthy snacks help improve concentration, sleep and energy levels
- > Get children involved in the kitchen. Let them help prepare and cook family meals and packed lunches
- > Grow herbs or vegetables in pots or tubs. Try tomatoes, strawberries and cress.



# Easy ways to get 5-a-day

It is easier than you think to give kids five portions of fruit and vegetables a day. Fresh, frozen, juiced, canned and dried all count. A portion is roughly a handful.

- > Make fruit kebabs
- > Add sweetcorn to tuna
- > Prepare a bowl of sliced fruit
- > Try mashing vegetables with potatoes
- > Offer unsweetened fruit juice at breakfast
- > Add vegetables into sauces, stews and soups
- > Chop vegetables into sticks and let children dip them into hummus.



## Breakfast ideas:

A healthy breakfast sets children up for the day and helps to keep blood glucose levels balanced through the morning, so they will be more alert.

- > Have porridge or low sugar, high fibre, wholegrain cereal with semi-skimmed milk. Many cereals are fortified with vitamins and minerals, which can be important to boost children's nutrient intake
- > Add chopped fruit to cereal
- > Try boiled, poached or scrambled egg with wholegrain toast and low-fat spread.

## Snack check:

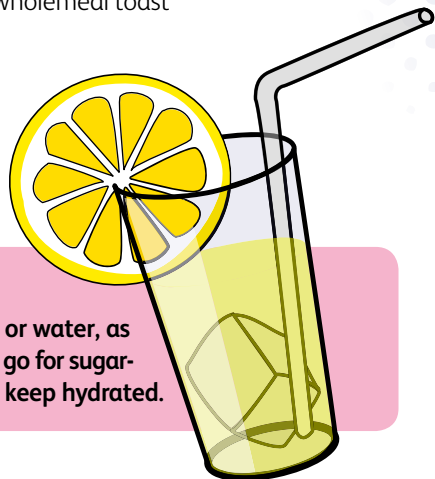
Save snacks that are high in fat and sugar for occasional treats. Aim for one fruit snack and one other healthy snack a day. Try:

- > Home-made ice lollies made with sugar free squash or diluted fruit juice
- > Small bowl of vegetable soup and a slice of wholemeal toast
- > Toasted English muffin with low sugar jam
- > Low fat yoghurt or fromage frais
- > Small pot of prepared fruit
- > Currant bun or teacake
- > Plain popcorn
- > Bread sticks.



## DRINKS

The best drinks for children are semi-skimmed milk or water, as they do not damage teeth. If children like fruit drinks go for sugar-free squash or diluted fruit juice. Encourage kids to keep hydrated.





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**The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy** is the professional, educational and trade union body for the United Kingdom's 50,000 chartered physiotherapists, physiotherapy students and assistants

**The British Dietetic Association** is the professional body and trade union for dietitians.

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This document can be made available in a format for people with sight problems. Tel: **020 7306 6666**

### **If your child has a disability**

Children with disabilities, special needs, limited mobility or developmental coordination disorder, may require a more specialised exercise plan but most can still enjoy and benefit from a range of physical activities.

For more information about organisations who can help, contact the CSP on **0207 306 6666** or the Association of Paediatric Chartered Physiotherapists at [VA@apcp.org.uk](mailto:VA@apcp.org.uk)

**DISCLAIMER:** The activities suggested in this guide have been designed to cover a range of abilities and should not cause any harm. If you do experience pain or discomfort as a result of any of the activities, stop immediately and speak to a health professional, such as a chartered physiotherapist or your GP