

HEALTHY LIVING HABITS



In children and adults alike, being healthy involves caring for both physical and mental well-being. Parents can have a big impact on several components of their children's health.

This article will focus on helping parents maximize their child's health through things they can control, such as good eating habits, exercising and staying active, getting adequate sleep, and limiting screen time.

Eating Habits

At Rockford Pediatrics, we recognize that there are a lot of barriers to eating healthy, such as busy family schedules and picky toddlers, to name a few. However, whether you have a toddler or a teen, there are ways that you, as a parent, can improve your child's eating habits.

Family Meals

We understand that with busy schedules it is not always possible to sit down as a whole family, but try to **make it a priority to [eat family meals](#) as often as you can**. Family meals are important for both parents and kids, so try to pick a time when the whole family is available, even if it means eating a little later to accommodate sports practices or grabbing take out and eating it together

between activities. Children do well with the ritual of family meals and parents get a chance to sit down and catch up with their kids. They are a great time to talk to your kids about their day and discuss things that are important to your family. Mealtimes are also an opportunity to explore a variety of new, healthy foods and to demonstrate appropriate portion size and pace of eating. Research has shown that kids/teens who take part in [regular family meals](#) are more likely to eat fruits and vegetables, less likely to snack on unhealthy foods and, amazingly, less likely to smoke, use marijuana or drink alcohol. So, try to make an effort to sit down as a family as often as possible!

Always Eat Breakfast

Getting everyone out the door in time for school can be a challenge, but make sure that your children are getting a good start to their day by eating a healthy breakfast. Breakfast provides your child with the energy they need to make it through a busy day of school and after-school activities. If possible, get your child to eat some protein in the morning. Some good examples of quick breakfast proteins include **eggs, whole grain cereal with milk, oatmeal, yogurt and toast with peanut butter**. Model this behavior by eating a healthy breakfast with your children. [Studies have shown](#) that skipping meals, especially breakfast, makes it harder for adults and teens to maintain a healthy weight. So, this can be an important first step in achieving a healthier family.

Select Healthy Foods

As parents, you control what food is brought into the home and therefore you, for the most part, control the food your children eat. So, keep the junk food out! Make it simple for kids to choose healthy snacks by keeping fruits and vegetables on-hand, in plain view and ready to eat. Other good snacks include low-fat yogurt, low-fat cheese sticks, and peanut butter and crackers.

Here are some other tips for healthier eating:

- Attempt to serve fruits or vegetables at every meal.
- Serve lean meats, like poultry and fish, more often than red meat and when preparing meats, choose healthier cooking methods such as baking, broiling, grilling or steaming.
- Increase the variety of foods by mixing in other sources of protein, such as eggs, beans, nuts and peanut butter.
- When selecting grains, choose whole-grain breads and pasta, brown rice over white and cereal with high fiber.
- In children over 2 years old, choose low-fat and nonfat dairy products.

In addition to increasing healthy food options, it is also important to **limit fast food, unhealthy snacks, chips and candy**, to name a few. You do not have to ban

these items, just have them in moderation. Finally, **limit sugary drinks** such as soda, energy drinks, sports drinks and juice. Have your children drink water or low-fat milk instead.

At Rockford Pediatrics, we have a dietitian available who can help if you are struggling with meal planning, picky eaters, food allergies, portion sizes or a variety of other dietary concerns. Please call us at 616-259-6100 if you would like to [set up an appointment](#).

Exercise

Children and adolescents five years and older should get [at least an hour a day of physical activity](#). Most of the hour should be an activity that will get their heart rate up. In addition, children should participate in muscle-strengthening and bone-strengthening activities at least three days a week. Kids can get this exercise by **visiting the playground, participating in organized sports or just playing outside**. Try to tailor activities towards your child's interests. The best activity for your child is whatever exercise your child will actually do!

Role Model Exercise

If your kids see that exercise is important to you, they will be more likely to stay active. Choose activities that can be done as a family, even if it is as simple as playing basketball in the driveway, taking a family bike ride or going sledding in the winter.

Sleep

Adequate sleep is vital for children's growth and their overall health. It is difficult for children to focus in school or fight off infections when their bodies are not well rested.

The [required amount of sleep varies](#) by child and age, but it is important for all children to get an adequate amount of sleep.

Here are the recommended hours of sleep kids should get:

- Toddlers 11-14 hours
- Preschoolers 10-13 hour
- School aged children 9-12 hours
- Teenagers 8-10 hours

Limit Screen Time

Technology is a big part of our lives. It is difficult to escape the attraction, and sometimes the addiction, of social media, video games or television. Like healthy

eating and exercising, it is important that parents role model good control of screen time for their children and teens.

The [American Academy of Pediatrics](#) recommends that children 2 to 5 years of age have screen time limited to one hour per day. For kids 6 years and older, parents should set limits on screen time and monitor the types of digital media that their children use. The more time a child spends in front of a screen means less time for doing other things such as exercise, sleep or homework.

At Rockford Pediatrics, we are committed to helping families keep their children healthy. We hope that this has been useful, and please call our office at 616-259-6100 if you have questions or would like to schedule an appointment!