

HOW DO I...

Build my child's basic wellness habits like sleep, diet, and exercise?

Advice for Parents and Caregivers

- **Make wellness a routine.** Plan healthy meals together, or get moving with family bike rides, park trips, or silly dance parties. Encourage sleep through family routines, too: cozy up together for bedtime stories or listen to relaxing music before lights out.
- **Understanding healthy choices.** Help kids understand how different foods affect their bodies and minds and show them how other healthy choices can make them feel better. Explain how eating veggies gives them strong muscles, getting enough sleep makes their brains sharper, and exercise fuels their energy to play like their favorite athletes.
- **Discuss healthy habits early.** Start talking about healthy choices when kids are small and involve them in meal prep and food shopping. Let them pick out new fruits at the store, help wash veggies, or stir the batter for healthy pancakes. Playing a role in making healthy meals will make them more interested in eating them.



Scan to watch our
video on this topic.

- **Have routine family check-ins.** Talk about how things are going and celebrate successes. Did everyone get enough sleep? Did everyone try a new food? Praise efforts to be healthy and work together on areas that need a little tweak, like reminding each other to turn off screens before bed.

9 Tips for Helping Kids Develop Basic Wellness Habits

- 1. Establish age-appropriate wellness habits as a family.** Predictable (but flexible) sleeping, eating, and exercise routines at home are the bedrock of physical and mental health.
- 2. Explain why positive health habits are important.** People do best when they understand the “why” behind rules. So don’t punish kids for not eating their carrots, explain why it’s good for them to do so.
- 3. Involve kids in the process.** If little kids play a role in planning meals, cooking, and bedtime routines, they’ll be more confident to do these things on their own as they get older.
- 4. Schedule family check-ins.** Every once in a while, have a quick chat about how everyone is feeling, what’s going well, and what can use some adjustments.
- 5. Start small.** If you want to have better wellness habits as a family, don’t try to change everything overnight. Instead, start small. Swap out juice for water or trade an hour of screen time for a bike ride.
- 6. Watch your language.** Healthy habits are important but they can be tough topics for young people with changing bodies. How you talk about health is important. For example, avoid talking about weight when it comes to food. Instead, talk about how healthy food is fuel for your mind and body.
- 7. Address your own baggage.** Before teaching positive wellness habits to your kids, it can be helpful to take a hard look at your own habits. Think about any challenges you might have with food, sleep, or exercise.
- 8. Don’t make it black and white.** Instead of characterizing some foods or habits as “bad,” focus on keeping a healthy balance.
- 9. Let kids make mistakes.** Sometimes kids learn best when they are given room to test the limits. Every once in a while, consider letting them have dessert for dinner or stay up too late on a school night. Balance is healthy — they might also feel the effects for themselves.

To learn more, check out these helpful resources:

[Helping Your Child: Tips for Parents and Caregivers](#)
National Institute of Health

[Encouraging Good Sleep Habits](#)
The Child Mind Institute

[10 Tips for Managing a Healthy Household](#)
Houston Methodist Hospital

The Child Mind Institute is dedicated to transforming the lives of children and families struggling with mental health and learning disorders by giving them the help they need to thrive. We’ve become the leading independent nonprofit in children’s mental health by providing gold-standard care, delivering educational resources to millions of families each year, training educators in underserved communities, and developing tomorrow’s breakthrough treatments.