

February 2014 School Health Newsletter

February is Heart month, but healthy habits are important all year long. And establishing healthy habits in children is important for health across the lifespan. The **American Heart Association** developed a list of **10 Tips to Help Children Develop Health Habits**:

1. **Be a good role model** - You don't have to be perfect all the time, but if kids see you trying to eat right and getting physically active, they'll take notice of your efforts. You'll send a message that good health is important to your family.
2. **Keep things positive** - Kids don't like to hear what they can't do, tell them what they can do instead. Keep it fun and positive. Everyone likes to be praised for a job well done. Celebrate successes and help children and teens develop a good self-image.
3. **Get the whole family moving** - Plan times for everyone to get moving together. Take walks, ride bikes, go swimming, garden or just play hide-and-seek outside. Everyone will benefit from the exercise and the time together. Walking or bicycling to and from school is a great way for kids to move. *One Australian study indicated that children who are driven to school also participate in fewer active leisure activities. This led researchers to conclude that encouraging children to walk to school may help protect children's health. See the link at the bottom for the whole study.*
4. **Be realistic** - Setting realistic goals and limits are key to adopting any new behavior. Small steps and gradual changes can make a big difference in your health over time, so start small and build up.
5. **Limit TV, video game and computer time** - These habits lead to a sedentary lifestyle and excessive snacking, which increase risks for obesity and cardiovascular disease. Limit screen time to 2 hours per day.
6. **Encourage physical activities that they'll really enjoy** - Every child is unique. Let your child experiment with different activities until they find something that they really love doing. They'll stick with it longer if they love it.
7. **Pick truly rewarding rewards** - Don't reward children with tv, video games, candy or snacks for a job well done. Find other ways to celebrate good behavior.
8. **Make dinnertime a family time** - When everyone sits down together to eat, there's less chance of children eating the wrong foods or snacking too much. Get your kids involved in cooking and planning meals. Everyone develops good eating habits together and the quality time with the family will be an added bonus.
9. **Make a game of reading food labels** - The whole family will learn what's good for their health and be more conscious of what they eat. It's a habit that helps change behavior for a lifetime.
10. **Stay involved** - Be an advocate for healthier children. Make sure your children's healthcare providers are monitoring cardiovascular indicators like BMI, blood pressure and cholesterol. Talk to the school nurse at your child's school if you have questions or concerns. She can help connect families to a variety of resources depending on the need.

For the whole research article about kids who are driven to school, visit:

http://www.naspspa.org/AcuCustom/Sitename/Documents/DocumentItem/03%20Trapp%20ShortComm_pes%2020130009_337-346%20ej.pdf