

If your child is very overweight, there are lots you can do to help them become a healthy weight as they grow.

Very overweight children tend to grow up to be very overweight adults, which can lead to health problems. Research shows children who achieve a healthy weight tend to be fitter, healthier, better able to learn, and are more self-confident. They're also less likely to have low self-esteem and be bullied. As a parent, there are lots you can do to help your child become a healthier weight. Getting them to be more active and eat well is important.

Listen to your child's concern about their weight. Overweight children often know they have a weight problem, and they need to feel supported and in control of their weight.

Let them know that you love them, whatever their weight, and all you want is for them to be healthy and happy.

STEPS FOR SUCCESS

Here are 5 key ways to help your child achieve a healthy weight:

- be a good role model
- encourage 60 minutes, and up to several hours, of physical activity a day
- keep to child-sized portions
- eat healthy meals, drinks and snacks
- less screen time and more sleep

If your child has a medical condition, the advice in this article may not be relevant. You should check with a GP or hospital doctor first.

BE A GOOD ROLE MODEL

One of the best ways to instil good habits in your child is to be a good role model.

Children learn by example. One of the most powerful ways to encourage your child to be active and eat well is to do so yourself.

Set a good example by going for a walk or bike ride instead of watching TV or surfing the internet.

Playing in the park or swimming with your children shows them being active is fun.

Any changes you make to your child's diet and lifestyle are much more likely to be accepted if the changes are small and involve the whole family.

GET ACTIVE

Very overweight children don't need to do more exercise than slimmer children. Their extra body weight means they'll naturally burn more calories for the same activity.

All children need about 60 minutes of physical activity a day for good health, but it doesn't need to be all at once.

Several short 10-minute, or even 5-minute, bursts of activity throughout the day can be just as good as an hour-long stretch.

For younger children it can take the form of active play, such as ball games, chasing games like "it" and "tag", riding a scooter, and using playground swings, climbing frames and see-saws.

For older children it could include riding a bike, skateboarding, walking to school, skipping, swimming, dancing and martial arts.

If your child isn't used to being active, encourage them to start with what they can do and build up to 60 minutes a day.

They're more likely to stick to their new activity levels if you let them choose the type of activity they're comfortable with.

Walking or cycling short distances instead of using the car or bus is a great way to be active together as a family. And you'll save money, too.

CHILD-SIZE PORTIONS

Try to avoid feeding your child large portions. A good rule of thumb is to start meals with small servings and let your child ask for more if they're still hungry.

Try not to make your child finish everything on the plate or eat more than they want to.

And avoid using adult-size plates for younger children as it encourages them to eat oversized portions.

Beware of high-calorie foods. Calories are a measure of the energy in food.

Knowing how many calories your child consumes each day, and balancing that with the amount of energy they use up in activity, will help them reach and stay at a healthy weight.

You can keep track of your child's daily calorie intake with MyFitnessPal's free [online calorie counter](#) (also available as an app).

Explain to your child how to get the balance of their diet right using the [Eatwell Guide](#). It shows how much they should eat from each food group.

EAT HEALTHY MEALS

Children, just like adults, should aim to eat 5 or more portions of fruit and vegetables every day. They're a great source of fibre and [vitamins and minerals](#).

Getting 5 A Day shouldn't be too difficult. Almost all fruit and vegetables count towards your child's 5 A Day, including fresh, tinned, frozen and dried.

Juices, smoothies, [beans and pulses](#) also count.

But be aware that unsweetened 100% fruit juice, vegetable juice and smoothies can only ever count as a maximum of 1 portion of their 5 A Day.

For example, if they have 2 glasses of fruit juice and a smoothie in 1 day, those still only count as 1 portion.

Their combined total of drinks from fruit juice, vegetable juice and smoothies shouldn't be more than 150ml a day, which is a small glass.

For example, if they have 150ml of orange juice and a 150ml smoothie in 1 day, they'll have exceeded the recommendation by 150ml.

When fruit is blended or juiced, it releases the sugars. This increases the risk of tooth decay, so it's best to drink fruit juice or smoothies at mealtimes.

Discourage your child from having sugary or high-fat foods like sweets, cakes, biscuits, some sugary cereals, and sugar-sweetened soft and fizzy drinks.

These foods and drinks tend to be high in calories and low in nutrients.

Aim for your child to get most of their calories from healthier foods like fruit and vegetables, and starchy foods like bread, potatoes, pasta and rice (preferably wholemeal).

And switch sweetened drinks for water.

[Get tips to help your kids enjoy their 5 A Day](#)

[Get tasty 5 A Day family-friendly recipes.](#)

[Find out more about healthy drinks for children](#)

[Swap high-fat foods for healthier alternatives](#)

Get ideas for [sugar swaps](#) when you shop and healthier swaps for breakfast, snacks and puddings.