

## CHAPTER 1

### TEN HABITS FOR A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE

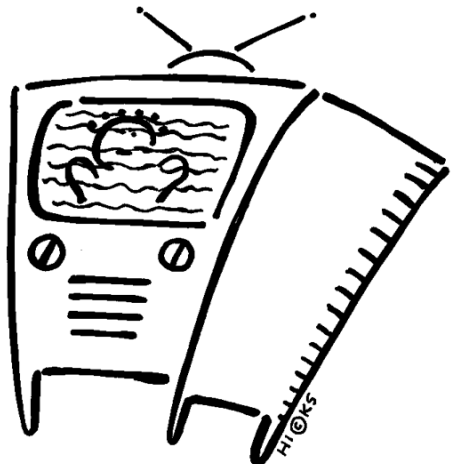
**Learning fresh approaches to routine behaviors is the first step to a healthy lifestyle. These ten habits sum up choices that spell the difference between fitness and fatness. Use this list as your blueprint for shaping the healthy, energetic way of life you want to achieve.**



- 1. Choose to move.** Building more physical activity into your life is key to a healthy lifestyle. Playing sports, enrolling in exercise programs, and attending PE class are all good. But, everyday activity counts for a lot, too. Simple things like walking or riding your bike to school instead of taking the bus or choosing bowling over a movie for Saturday entertainment go a long way toward improving fitness.

***Your goal:*** Start now with at least 20 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise a day. Work up to 60 minutes daily.

- 2. Cut down on screen time.** The average kid spends over 3 hours a day watching TV. When you tally up videos and computer games as well, the total tops 5 hours each day. That leaves little—if any—time for physical activity.

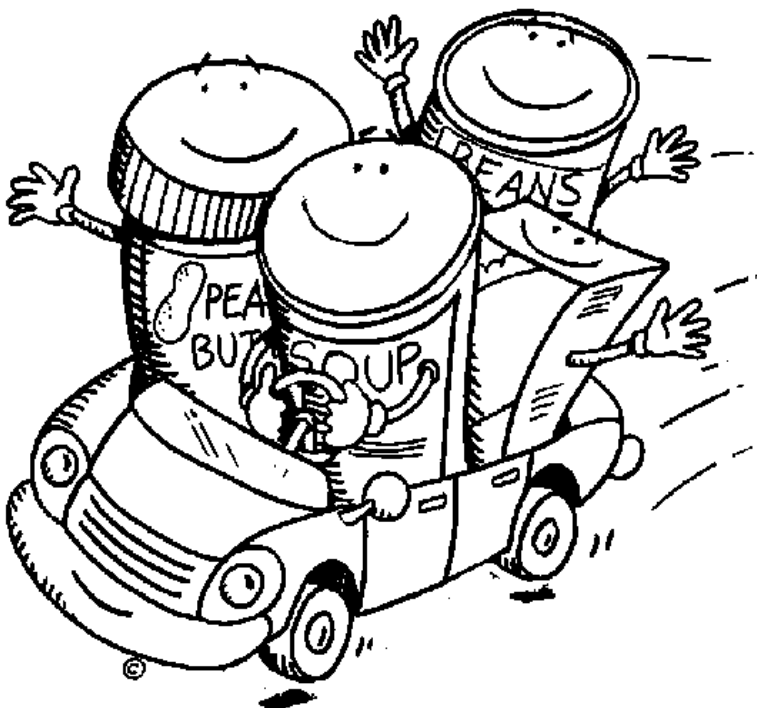


Compounding the problem, TV often goes hand-in-hand with snacking on the high-fat, sugary foods advertised in children's programming.

***Your goal:*** Set limits on the amount TV, videos, and computer time in your day. Brainstorm other fun things to do, such as sports, outdoor play, reading, or hobbies. When the TV is on, get up and move during commercials—but not to the refrigerator! Discourage eating in front of the tube.

- 3. Steer clear of sugary drinks.** Liquid sweets—such as soda pop, flavored teas, fruit juice beverages, and energy drinks—represent a major source of calories for many children and teens. However, these drinks are the nutritional equivalent of a candy bar in a bottle. Plus, it's easy to rack up more calories than you need when you consume them in liquid form.

***Your goal:*** Satisfy your liquid needs with 8 to 10 glasses of water each day, and 2 to 3 servings of skim milk.



**4. Limit fast food.**

It's quick, it's easy—some of it even tastes good—but fast food has super-sized drawbacks. Typical menu items—burgers, fries, and shakes—are loaded with fat and light on nutrients. In addition,

restaurants tend to serve portions that are much larger than standard serving sizes, a practice that promotes overeating.

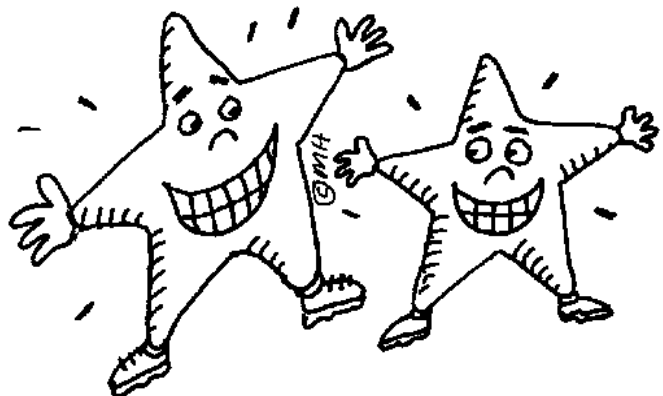
**Your goal:** Allow yourself no more than one fast food meal a week. Choose a "kid-sized" portion rather than the "value meal," and ask them to hold the mayo, bacon, and special sauce. Have water or a diet drink rather than regular soda.

- 5. Respect your appetite.** You don't have to finish everything on your plate. Stop when you feel full. Parents, this is an important point to keep in mind when feeding young children. Forcing kids to clean their plates encourages overeating later on. Older children and adults, start learning to listen when your stomach signals that it's had enough. Also, remember that it takes at least 30 minutes for the feeling of fullness to be registered by your brain, so try to eat slowly.



**Your goal:** Aim for three balanced meals a day plus in-between snacks for kids. The main dish should take up only 1/3 of the plate. Fill in the rest of the meal with fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. Get to know what a reasonable portion looks like, so you'll know when you've been offered too much. Eat slowly and chew your food completely.

- 6. Don't use food as a reward.** Telling kids, "eat your vegetables or you don't get dessert,"



does more harm than good in the long run. Using sweets as a pay-off for good behavior makes these foods even more desirable to a child, and can lead to overindulging down the road. This practice also reinforces the notion that vegetables must be "yucky." Why else would adults need to bribe you to eat them?

***Your goal:*** Rely on non-food treats such as CDs, toys, or a special outing to celebrate accomplishments. Remember, incentives are important—especially when you're making tough behavior changes.

- 7. Eat breakfast.** Kids who skip breakfast are more likely to snack more throughout the day and overeat at other meals. Most popular snack foods are high in fat and calories and don't supply much nutrition, so this pattern can lead to overweight. Also, skipping breakfast actually makes you hold on to more calories and eat larger proportions at lunch time. In general, the more meals you eat per day, the less you will eat on a daily basis!



***Your goal:*** Try a breakfast that combines whole grain carbohydrates with some fruit and a low-fat dairy item. When choosing cereals, look for types with 3 or more grams of fiber per serving and little or no added sugar.

(See "Quick and healthy breakfast ideas," in Chapter XX: Nutrition and Weight.)

- 8. Choose more fruits and vegetables.** This food group has a lot going for it. Fruits and vegetables are chockfull of vitamins and other nutrients. A diet



rich in these foods helps protect you from heart disease and some forms of cancer. Fruits and vegetables also fill you up without providing a lot of calories. This is a big plus when you're trying to control your weight. Most people don't get anywhere near the recommended 4 ½ cups of fruits and vegetables daily. The ones who do tend to stay leaner.

***Your goal:*** Include a fruit or vegetable in every meal.



*Hint: raw veggies with low-fat dip make a satisfying snack. Avoid canned fruits, especially if they are packed in syrup.*

- 9. Make fitness a family project.** Kids follow their parents' example when it comes to eating and exercise habits. Also, lifestyle decisions such as the meals you serve, how much time the TV is on, and type of family recreation you choose affect the whole household. That's why a successful lifestyle change takes the support of all family members.

***Your goal:*** Start with 2 or 3 lifestyle changes for you and your family to work on. When you reach these goals, you can move on to others on your list.

- 10. Stay positive.** Children's feelings about themselves are often a reflection of their parents' attitudes toward them. Parents can create a positive environment for change by communicating love and acceptance.



***Your goal:*** Offer support and understanding to family members trying to make changes. Parents—listen to your children’s feelings and concerns. Let children know they are special and important.