

Dear Family,

What's for dinner? That simple question can open a host of concerns: Is the food I'm preparing healthy? How much should my child be eating? My child will eat only mac 'n' cheese. Buying healthy foods can be expensive!

Relax! You can serve up healthy food choices that even the pickiest of eaters will savor without breaking your budget. Healthy eating includes **foods that are low in saturated fat, trans fat, salt (sodium), and added sugars**. For kids ages 4–18, keep the total fat intake between 25 percent and 35 percent of their calories, with most fats coming from sources of polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fatty acids, such as fish, nuts, and vegetable oils. Offer **whole grains and a variety of fruits and veggies**. Serve **fat-free and low-fat dairy foods**. Limit foods **that are high in saturated fat, trans fat, salt (sodium), and added sugars**. As for the “clean your plate” rule, get rid of it. Overeating is one reason kids get too many calories.

Got a picky eater? **Introduce healthier items into foods your child already likes**: top cereal with fruit, add blueberries to whole-grain pancakes, or shred veggies over rice. **Play the eat-your-colors game** with brightly colored fruits and vegetables, and **include your child in the preparation**—it may make him or her more likely to eat the food. **Don't buy unhealthy foods**. If there are no chips in the house, kids will munch on healthier options instead.

Sincerely,

teacher



Your child is a participant in the American Heart Association's Kids Heart Challenge. The AHA has five priority messages for your family:

Physical Activity

♥ Healthy Eating

Sodium

Sodas and Other Sugary Drinks

Tobacco/Smoking



On a budget? Try these **healthy choices that are less than \$1 per serving**. Then go to the American Heart Association website at heart.org/HealthierKids to find more.

- **Apples, bananas, oranges, and pears**—Eat one as a snack or serve it in a fruit salad with dinner. Bananas are tasty in smoothies, and a pear served with cheese makes a tasty appetizer. Cut it up to serve as finger food. One piece of medium-size fruit equals one serving.
- **Baby carrots**—Eat them as a snack, include them in a stew, or serve them in a veggie platter.
- **Fat-free or low-fat yogurt**—Eat it as a snack or use it in a smoothie. A six-ounce container usually is one serving. Read the Nutrition Facts label and select a yogurt without a lot of added sugars.
- **Sweet potato**—Bake it, mash it, steam it! One medium sweet potato is one serving.
- **Oatmeal**—Serve it hot for breakfast. One serving is a half cup.
- **Frozen or fresh corn on the cob**—This is a quick, kid-friendly side dish. One ear of corn is one serving.

Good to Know!

Chew on this: **One in three American kids and teens is overweight or obese**. This contributes to a wide range of health problems for kids, including **high blood pressure, diabetes, and high blood cholesterol levels**. Excess weight at young ages also has been linked to earlier death rates as adults. Teach your child good habits that will last a lifetime!

Dear Family,

Jump rope, play tag, ride a bike, or just run—how important is it for your child to get up and get moving? For starters, **physical activity helps control weight, reduces blood pressure, raises “good” cholesterol, and reduces the risk of diabetes and some kinds of cancer.** It also improves self-confidence and self-esteem, can improve moods, and can help improve sleep. That’s all good news! The American Heart Association recommends that all **children ages two and older participate in at least 60 minutes of enjoyable, moderate- to vigorous-intensity physical activity every day (that means vigorous activities that are appropriate to their age, gender, and stage of physical and emotional development).** The benefits go beyond good health: physical activity can bring a family together, it doesn’t have to cost any money, and it’s fun!

Remember, your child doesn’t have to do 60-minute workouts. Two 30-minute or even four 15-minute periods of physical activity a day will benefit your child too.

Sincerely,

teacher



American
Heart
Association.

Your child is a participant in the American Heart Association’s Kids Heart Challenge. The AHA has five priority messages for your family:

- Physical Activity
- Healthy Eating
- Sodium
- Sodas and Other Sugary Drinks
- Tobacco/Smoking

Research shows that active parents raise active children.

Join your child with these tips to work activity into your daily routine:

- **Get outdoors!** Hike a local nature trail or ride bicycles along a bike path.
- **Schedule a family playtime.** Take a walk or play a family game of tag. Play catch or kick a ball around the yard.
- **Select toys that encourage movement,** such as balls, kites, skates, sleds, and jump ropes.
- **Limit screen time** to no more than two hours a day. Don’t put a television in your child’s bedroom, and limit computer and tablet use to school projects.
- **Plant a garden.** Caring for plants provides a reason to get outside, teaches kids where their food comes from, and lets your child sample fresh-grown foods to encourage healthy eating habits.
- **Do chores, such as raking leaves and shoveling snow, as a family.** The work will be completed more quickly, leaving more time for outdoor play!



Good to Know!

Here’s a fact: healthy kids have better grades in school, have better attendance, and behave better in class. Getting active is an important step to good health! Learn more at heart.org/HealthierKids.

Dear Family,

Bubble, fizz, ahhhh...when you have kids, it's tough to keep soda and other sugar-sweetened beverages out of your grocery cart. But think about this: **a child who drinks one or more cans of sugar-sweetened beverages a day is 55 percent more likely to be overweight than a child who drinks little or none.** Regular soda has lots of calories, no nutrients, and more sugar—about nine teaspoons per can—than your child's body needs. Sugary drinks—including regular sodas, sports drinks, energy drinks, and juice drinks with added sugar—are also **linked to other health problems like heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, and tooth decay.** Let's work together to teach about healthier beverage choices. Reach for water first. Milk and 100% fruit juice can also be good options, but remember that your drinking glass may have multiple servings. Encourage good nutrition both in and out of the classroom!

Sincerely,

teacher



American
Heart
Association®

Your child is a participant in the American Heart Association's Kids Heart Challenge. The AHA has five priority messages for your family:

Physical Activity

Healthy Eating

Sodium



Sodas and Other
Sugary Drinks

Tobacco/Smoking



It's sometimes better to show your kids rather than just tell them. Here are some great ways to demonstrate why you should limit sweetened beverages.

- **Show them the oh-so-gross syrupy sludge in sweetened beverages.** Pour a can of regular soda (or a sports drink or sweetened juice) into a pot. Bring the drink to a boil and, once most of the water from the drink has boiled away, carefully spoon out the thick, syrupy residue that remains. Yuck! Does your child really want to drink this?
- **Demonstrate the amount of sugar in some beverages.** Gather sugar packets and two glasses. Place a 20-ounce bottle of regular soda by one glass and fill the second glass with water. Have your child count out 22 packets of sugar, tear them open, and pour the sugar in the glass by the soda. Point out that there is no sugar in water. Which drink is the healthier option?
 - **Want a refreshing alternative?** Put 100% fruit juice in an ice tray, insert round toothpicks, and freeze. Then invite your child to enjoy this healthier mini ice pop!

Good to Know!

Diet soda doesn't have any calories, but it doesn't have any nutrients either. When you're thirsty, water is your best bet because there are no calories in water and your body needs plenty of it to function well. To learn more, go to the American Heart Association's website at heart.org/HealthierKids.

Dear Family,

It's time to give salt the shake! Too much sodium can cause extra fluid to build up in the bloodstream, adding a burden to the heart as it works to pump blood through the body. Being aware of the sodium in foods may **help your child lower or avoid high blood pressure**. The American Heart Association recommends that **we consume less than 1,500 milligrams of sodium a day—just over a half teaspoon of salt**. Since about 75 percent of the sodium we eat comes from processed foods and is already added to our food before we buy it, it can be difficult to control sodium intake. Teach your child how to read labels to be aware of the many hidden sources of sodium. Pay particular attention to the “Salty Six” foods that contribute the most sodium to Americans’ diets—soup, breads and rolls, cold cuts and cured meats, pizza, poultry, and sandwiches. Other foods, such as cheese and snacks, can also be high in salt.

Keep in mind that different brands and restaurant versions of the same foods may have different sodium levels. Some foods come in versions with less sodium, too. Compare labels and choose the product with the lowest amount of sodium you can find.



Sincerely,

teacher



American
Heart
Association®

Your child is a participant in the American Heart Association's Kids Heart Challenge. The AHA has five priority messages for your family:

Physical Activity

Healthy Eating

 Sodium

Sodas and Other
Sugary Drinks

Tobacco/Smoking

On the lookout for salt sneaking into your child's diet?

Try these suggestions:

- Yikes! A small order of french fries at a fast food restaurant contains anywhere from 134 milligrams to 257 milligrams of sodium! **If your child loves fries, ask for the order with no salt added and then split it** between the two of you or with a sibling. You'll cut down on the sodium plus save both cash and calories!
- Teach your child to **read nutrition labels and know what the words on food packages mean**. For example, “sodium free” means there is less than five milligrams of sodium in a serving; “reduced” or “less sodium” means there is at least 25 percent less sodium than the regular version of the product.

Good to Know!

The average American takes in more than **3,400 milligrams of sodium** each day—more than double what the American Heart Association recommends. The body needs a little sodium each day to function properly, but the amount we eat is far too high and can increase the risk of high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, and other health problems. To learn more, visit the American Heart Association website at heart.org/sodium.

Dear Family,

Did you know that **more than 2,300 people younger than 18 years of age begin smoking cigarettes every day**? Many of these young smokers picked up the habit before entering high school, increasing their risk for heart disease and stroke. **Smoking is the most important preventable cause of premature death in the United States.** It increases the risk of coronary heart disease and is linked to stroke, lung cancer, and many other types of cancer. On average, **smokers die more than ten years earlier than nonsmokers.**

Be aware of *e-cigarettes*. These battery-powered devices deliver a vapor of nicotine and other additives and are marketed in kid-friendly flavors like cherry, peach, and vanilla. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that in 2012, **more than 1.78 million middle and high school students tried e-cigarettes.** In addition to cigarettes and e-cigarettes, talk to your children about all forms of tobacco—cigarillos and smokeless tobacco are also heavily marketed to children.

Take the time to talk to your child about this important topic; even young children can understand that smoking is bad for their health. Talk about the risks associated with smoking and take steps to protect your child from secondhand smoke.

If you are a smoker, there are important steps that you can take today. Your lungs can begin to heal themselves as soon as you stop smoking. The risk of heart disease can be reduced by following a treatment plan—and one of the most important parts of that plan is to stop smoking.

Sincerely,

teacher



Your child is a participant in the American Heart Association's Kids Heart Challenge. The AHA has five priority messages for your family:

Physical Activity

Healthy Eating

Sodium

Sodas and Other
Sugary Drinks

❤️ Tobacco/Smoking



Here are a few easy steps you can take to make sure your child doesn't try cigarettes:

- **Set an example by not smoking.** Give consistent messages about the risks of smoking and make it clear to your child that you don't want him or her to smoke. Explain that no tobacco product is safe. These include smokeless tobacco products, which also increase the risks of heart attack, stroke, and certain cancers. Make sure your child understands that e-cigarettes and fruit-flavored cigarillos also are not safe alternatives.
- **Set a smoke-free policy in your home.** Exposure to secondhand smoke can increase the risk for a heart attack or stroke. More than 33,000 nonsmokers die every year from coronary heart disease caused by exposure to secondhand smoke. Children of smokers have many more respiratory infections than children of nonsmokers.
 - **If you're a smoker, seriously consider quitting and don't smoke around your children.** And remember, cigars and pipes aren't safer alternatives to cigarettes; people who smoke these still have a higher risk of death from coronary heart disease than nonsmokers.

