

News Column

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Habits for Raising Healthy Kids

Good health behaviors and habits often start in childhood and follow us into adulthood. Implementing small changes that will give children the chance to move their bodies, limit time spent on screens, and provide access to varieties of healthy foods can have great impacts over time. Try one or more of these tips to help kids develop lifelong healthy habits.

Move together. Exercise is an essential part of each day. Children aged 3 to 5 years need a variety of physically active play throughout the day. Children aged 6 to 17 years need at least one hour of physical activity. Playing together is a great way to encourage all members of your family to be active. Activities such as taking a walk, playing games in the yard, visiting a park, or turning on some music for a dance party are great ways to get kids active. Some activity is better than none at all.

Set limits on screen time. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends children aged 2 to 5 years have less than one hour of high-quality screen time each day. As children progress in age, you will want to set consistent limits that allow for adequate sleep, activity, and family time. Interact with children when they use screens as this can help them better understand what they see and introduce boundaries.

Choose healthy food alternatives for the whole family. There are many ways to improve your family's health and nutrition. Think about your drinks, snacks, and cooking methods. For drinks, choose water or unflavored low-fat milk instead of sugary options like soda or fruit drinks. For snacks, consider trying nuts, seeds, or olives instead of chips and crackers. When cooking, take advantage of the microwave or oven to bake, steam, or roast foods instead of frying.

Create bedtime routines. Getting enough sleep improves concentration in school, academic performance, and can help maintain a healthy weight. School-aged children need 9 to 11 hours of sleep each night, while younger children need even more. Having consistent bedtime routines can take the stress out of bedtime and make it easier for everyone to fall asleep.

Healthy family habits like the ones listed above are shown to improve academics, mental health, raise confidence levels, and decrease the risk of disease. Doing them together offers a bonus of quality time that can strengthen family bonds.

For more information about Family and Community Wellness, 4-H Youth Development, or K-State Research and Extension, contact the office at 620-583-7455, email me at celutz@ksu.edu, or stop by the office. Visit the K-State Research and Extension - Greenwood County Facebook page and www.greenwood.k-state.edu for more up-to-date information on programming.