Parenting your child for a healthy weight
Make Home a Safe-Food Haven

As a parent, you are the nutritional gatekeeper of the home, so if you don’t want a child to eat a food, don’t bring it into your house. Keeping a healthy home is not as extreme as it may sound. If you love ice cream, go out as a family once a week for a modest serving of the real thing. It’s far more satisfying than the fat-free varieties that many families eat each night.

Sit down to family meals
A family that eats together stays healthy together. Keep in mind that family meals don’t have to be “family style.” Keep serving bowls and platters off the table to help your family resist the urge to go back for seconds or thirds.

Role model
You may not think you’re a role model, but your children are aware of everything you do: If you forbid your child to eat candy but keep a stash in your car, your child may receive a mixed message. Modeling healthy behaviors at the table will help children pick up good habits. In addition, don’t put yourself down or talk about your weight in front of your child—instead, try to focus on positive health patterns, not pounds.

Use simple science
Our experts have done extensive research on healthy foods and behaviors. Learn how easy it is to get your family on a low-glycemic diet of fruits, vegetables and other nutritious whole foods and how beneficial it can be to keep processed foods and sugary drinks out of the house.
Kids who sit in front of a TV or computer screen burn fewer calories than those who engage in physical activities. But there are other ways television leads to weight gain in kids.

Sitting in front of a screen encourages mindless eating: that repetitive hand-to-mouth motion that occurs when we eat with our attention focused elsewhere. For this reason, it is especially important to turn off the TV while eating meals and snacks.

Kids who watch TV are also exposed to advertisements, many of which are for sugary cereals, snack foods, soda and other foods that are high in calories and low in nutritional value.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends limiting screen time to two hours a day for children 2 and older, and it recommends that children younger than 2 avoid watching television altogether.
Letting Reality Be Your Guide

Set realistic expectations
It’s hard for anyone to change habits, but it’s especially hard for children. Keeping your expectations in check will help you to stay positive and support your child. Understand what is and is not appropriate for your child’s age. For instance, asking an 8-year-old to “just say no” to dessert is a set-up for failure, but offering him healthful and satisfying alternatives can help.

Know the difference between physical and emotional hunger
Take stock of your child’s emotional state. In many instances, overeating is caused by feelings of sadness, anxiety or boredom. If you suspect that your child may be eating for emotional reasons, talk to him and consider contacting a psychologist.
Choose Words Wisely

Example statements to help kids learn healthful eating habits:

“This is delicious. I’m going to savor every bite.”

“I’ve had enough to eat. I’m going to save this for later.”

It can be challenging to set limits around food. Here are some responses to try:

“You’ve had the right amount of food for a snack (or meal). Let’s try doing something else for a while and check if you’re still hungry in 20 minutes. What would you like to do now?”

“How hungry are you? A little or a lot?”
Teach Hunger Cues

Encourage children to use a scale to rate their hunger. Remind your child that “starving” or being “stuffed” is not healthy.
School-age Children Need More Supervision

Set a schedule for meals and snacks

Limit access to unhealthful foods

Model healthful eating habits

Determine appropriate portion sizes

Your Home
Screen Time
Let Reality Guide You
Choose Words Wisely
Teach Hunger Cues
School-age Children
Adolescents
Fun with Food
Sleep
Tools You Can Use
Adolescents Need Independence

- Adolescents need independence with food choices.
- Involve kids in selecting and cooking food.
- Be patient as they develop long-term habits.
- Listen to what they like and don’t like to eat.
- Avoid power struggles.
- Talk about how overeating isn’t a good way to cope with emotions.
- Withhold negative judgment.
- Support even their small efforts to eat well or be physically active.
- Consistently model healthy eating and behaviors.
- Create and manage a healthy food environment at home.
- Talk about how food impacts health.
Have Fun with Food

Depending on your child’s age, you might try some of the following ideas:

• Create a chart with healthful snack and menu combos so kids can pick from the “menu.”

• Make slower eating a focus of meals by talking about the food, chewing slowly and putting forks down in between bites.

• Help your child make a list of activities to choose from when a snack or meal is over, or when he is feeling bored. Put it on the refrigerator.

• Create dishes with foods your child likes; try not to focus on what he doesn’t like.

• Try new recipes regularly to prevent boredom.

• Make collages of sample plates with pictures of appropriate portion sizes.

• Ask your child “What will hit the spot?” because it will likely be more satisfying. Ask questions like “Do you want something cold, warm, crunchy or creamy?”

Encourage creative presentation, colorful plates and other fun ways to eat, since many kids like to help prepare food.
The Importance of Sleep

Not getting enough sleep is associated with a number of health problems, including diabetes, cardiovascular disease, obesity and depression. Therefore, it is very important to help your children get the right amount of sleep.

How to increase your child’s sleep:
- Give him a set bedtime.
- Remove the television from his room.
- Encourage relaxation before bed (e.g., reading, journaling, drawing or listening to calm music)

These values are taken from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) website, based on data from the National Sleep Foundation.

- 0-3 months: 12-18 hours
- 3-12 months: 14-15 hours
- 1-3 years: 12-14 hours
- 3-5 years: 11-13 hours
- 5-10 years: 10-11 hours
- 10-17 years: 8.5-9.5 hours
The following tools can support your efforts to parent in a positive way and set the stage for your child’s success. Choose the tools that are most appropriate for your child. Start with one or two and then add more once you’re feeling more confident.