



First Steps

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Let's Get Active

Our children do not come with instructions. Parents Reaching Out provides resources that help families make informed decisions about the care and education of their children. We thank the Parent Education Network, a project of Parents Helping Parents of Wyoming, Inc. for permitting us to share their *Thoughts for Tots* in this information series.

Are we becoming a nation of couch spuds? Or worse, crib potatoes? A new study says that preschoolers who watch a lot of television are more likely to be plump. Even more at risk are young children with TVs in their bedrooms. “The prevalence of overweight children was significantly related to the amount of time they spent watching TV or videos,” says a report published in a recent issue of *Pediatrics* magazine. Not surprisingly, kids with their own TVs watched 4.8 hours more TV and videos a week than those who did not have their own TVs. Because most children watch TV by age two, efforts to limit child TV/video viewing and to keep the TV out of the child’s bedroom need to begin before then.



Source: U.S. News & World Report, June 17, 2002

Researchers say that “from age 2 to 17, our kids spend up to a third of their waking hours in front of a TV....Other studies suggest that elementary-age children who watch less TV than their peers have fewer weight problems, better grades, and healthier relationships.”

Source: Parade Magazine, Sept. 15, 2002

Ways to Include More Exercise:

- Involve the whole family in a game. Sometimes all children need is someone to get them motivated.
- Play outdoors. Where there is room to run, chances are there will be more running, jumping, and rambunctious play.
- Go for a walk and look for animals or other interesting things in nature.
- Challenge the whole family to get in better shape. Set short-range goals that everyone can meet. (For example, walk around the block three times a week for two weeks, then increase to four times a week for two weeks, etc.)



Active Games

- Duck, Duck, Goose is a running game that is simple enough so even the youngest kids can join.
- Capture the Flag is a game that young children love to play. Even older children have fun with this game.
- Games like tag and follow-the-leader will help children stay active.
- T-ball, soccer, kickball, basketball, swimming and biking are all activities that can be modified for toddlers.

Why Get Active?

1. Less risk of being overweight in adulthood.
2. Increased exposures to sports, games, and exercise.
3. Good habits, started early, encourage a healthier lifestyle.
4. Children will feel more confident when interacting with other kids in games, sports, and outdoor play.



How to Help an Overweight Child

- ★ Encourage exercise.
- ★ Serve lots of fresh fruits and vegetables, without restricting any foods.
- ★ Limit the amount of candy and junk food you have in the house.
- ★ You are responsible for what food is available. If sweets are not available, then children will eat healthier snacks.
- ★ Nagging, coaxing, bribing, and complaining will always back-fire. It is best to help by increasing activity level and decreasing temptations for high-calorie foods.
- ★ Encourage your child to accept that everyone's body type is different. No one is perfect.
- ★ Set a good example: eat right and exercise yourself.
- ★ Avoid obsessing about weight (your child's and your own).
- ★ Children whose parents obsess about weight are more likely to have eating disorders later on.
- ★ Provide a variety of foods and avoid fad diets.
- ★ Offer finger foods such as cheese chunks and sliced fruits and vegetables that children can pick up with toothpicks or with their fingers.
- ★ Make available healthy snacks like raisins, cereal, granola, or crackers.



For more information call Parents Reaching Out. We offer phone consultations and provide workshops in English or Spanish to communities throughout New Mexico. This publication was developed under a grant from the New Mexico Department of Health Family Infant Toddler program. However, the views here expressed do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Health and should not be assumed to be an endorsement by the New Mexico Department of Health.