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Be a Leader!

## Be a Leader: Modeling Healthy Lifestyles to Young Children

Adults can help children develop healthy habits early in life that will bring lifelong benefits. Teaching children healthy eating habits—and modeling these behaviors—can help children maintain a healthy weight. In Mississippi, as well as in other states, childhood obesity is a concern. Many factors, like the increased consumption of fast food and soft drinks, increased time spent watching television and playing video games, and decreased physical activity, result in more children becoming overweight or obese. Also, children who are overweight or obese are at risk of becoming obese adults with chronic health issues. Unfortunately, busy lifestyles can make it hard to follow a daily schedule that includes healthy foods and physical activity.

It's easier to model and teach healthy nutrition choices to young children when they are involved in choosing and preparing foods. Also, being physically active just a few minutes each day or several times a week can help with weight control and contribute to overall health. Decide what best fits your family's schedule and lifestyle, and make it part of the weekly routine. Young children enjoy routines and will learn the benefits of healthy lifestyles when the family participates together.



### References:

American Heart Association: (<http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/>)  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Sciences  
<http://health.gov/paguidelines/blog/post/Parents-Should-Be-Role-Models-for-Healthy-Living.aspx>

Here are some tips to help model a healthy lifestyle:

- **Be a good role model.** As parents, we are not perfect all the time, but if our children see us making good decisions about food and physical activity, they take notice.



- **Everyone can benefit from exercise.** The whole family can be involved in taking walks, riding bikes, or going swimming. It's a family event!

- **Limit screen time.** In the U.S., screen time (watching TV, playing video games, and working on computers or mobile devices) can be excessive. It is important to limit screen time as it can lead to a less-active lifestyle and an increase in obesity and heart disease.



- **Dinnertime = family time.** Children enjoy being involved in planning and cooking meals. Doing this can lead to better eating habits and increased quality family time.



- **Be aware.** Ask your healthcare provider about the results of your child's BMI, blood pressure, and cholesterol tests.



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