



TEACH YOUR KIDS HEALTHY HABITS

When it comes to kids and healthy habits, studies suggest that two factors can play a big role: Kids establish lasting habits by age 9, and they can learn healthy habits as early as age 5. That means the early years offer a great opportunity to put children on track for healthy futures. But how do you do that? Here are some ideas.

Model good behavior. Kids respond better to examples than to rules and regulations. Adopt your own good habits so they can see what a healthy lifestyle looks like.

Keep it positive. A positive outlook feeds overall well-being, so show your kids what it's like to keep things positive.

Make meals healthy. Focus on fresh food and avoid junk

food, sugary drinks and oversized portions. And let kids help with food preparations, so they learn how to use healthy ingredients.

Encourage exercise. Take the kids on walks or bike rides, enroll them in sports programs, take fitness classes with them ... whatever works best to help them get active.

Limit screen time. Studies show that kids who spend a lot of time staring at screens develop sedentary lifestyles, which can lead to long-term health problems.

See the doctor. Keeping up with children's annual doctor visits will help to keep them healthy and allow you to address problems quickly.

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Smart Facts

40%

of kids say their health issues affect daily activities at least occasionally.

37%

of American kids under age 17 have at least one health condition.

40%

higher test scores are achieved by kids who are physically active.



CARING FOR KIDS' MENTAL HEALTH

Even before the pandemic, children were experiencing historic levels of depression, anxiety and other mental health challenges. But since COVID-19 emerged, kids have faced even more mental health crises.

As U.S. Surgeon General Vivek H. Murthy put in his recent advisory *Protecting Youth Mental Health*, "The challenges today's generation of young people face are unprecedented and uniquely hard to navigate. And the effect these challenges have had on their mental health is devastating."

Facing such realities, parents are looking for - and finding - ways to help. Following are some of the approaches experts suggest.

- **Be a model.** As is true with a child's physical health (see page 1), a child's mental health can be shaped by example. Care for your own mental health, and your child will benefit as well.
- **Make and encourage connections.** Strong, positive relationships - especially with adults, but also with peers - build up a child's resilience and help them thrive when faced with difficulties.
- **Provide stability.** Chaos, inconsistency and family turmoil harm children. Simple steps such as sticking to consistent dinner times and regular bedtimes and avoiding even mild arguments in front of the kids can do a lot to help kids stay healthy.
- **Address substance abuse.** Have frank conversations about the dangers of drugs and alcohol. Studies show that the earlier kids start using drugs and alcohol, the more likely they are to seriously abuse them, and the more likely they are to turn to them when times are tough.
- **Watch for warning signs.** Children's moods and behaviors - especially teens' - can be variable in all situations, but if you see sudden, dramatic changes in your child's behavior, pay attention. Signs such as sleeplessness, withdraw from activities they enjoy and declining performance at school could be signs of bigger issues.



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Of course, if you do see serious signs of distress, take action. Let your child know you are concerned, and then get professional help. If you're not sure where to turn, talk to your primary caregiver, a school counselor or other professionals for referrals.

With proper attention and treatment, children's mental health issues can be managed. Progress toward better mental health can begin with simply showing you care. That alone can send a positive message that could start a healing process.

For resources related to children's mental health, go to www.onoursleeves.org.

FAMILY-FRIENDLY BENEFITS GETTING A PANDEMIC-DRIVEN BOOST

Even before the pandemic, employers were ramping up benefits to attract the best employees in a tight labor market. When COVID-19 arrived, the trend gained new urgency as workers reassessed what they expect from work and life. In addition to prompting The Great Resignation, this reassessment prompted many workers to put greater emphasis on personal lives, family and overall wellness.

Employers are responding by shifting more resources to family-friendly benefits. In fact, a recent report from Willis Towers Watson said that, while nearly 60% of employers point to family-friendly benefits as "important to their talent strategy," that number likely will climb to 77% in the next three years. And what can employees expect from this shift? Following are some likely areas of impact.

Family-building. Recognizing that families are created in a variety of ways, companies will offer more family-building benefits, including some coverage for adoption services, surrogacy and more.

Family care. Sensitive to the fact that many workers are also caregivers, employers are expanding provisions for families, providing for such things as childcare referrals and back-up childcare, as well as benefits related to the care of other family members, especially those who are aging.

New-parent benefits. Continuing trends that began over the last couple of decades, employers expect to provide more support for new parents, including such things as dedicated rooms for nursing, phased return-to-work programs, greater remote-work flexibility and parent support groups.

Financial support. In recent years, employers have been pushed to include more financial benefits such as budgeting education and student-loan repayment. It's likely this trend will continue, with more resources put toward options such as life insurance, 529 college-savings plans and scholarships.

Mental health. Mental health has received greater attention in the culture as a whole, but certainly in the workplace, where employers have recognized that mental health issues can have a profound increasing coverage of mental health care but also providing stress-management services, meditation and mindfulness programs and even massage therapy.

General wellness. Employers are increasingly cognizant of the impact workers' overall well-being can have on their performance, and so are providing for more quality-of-life perks, including greater flexibility around when and where people work, additional paid-time-off options, enhanced use of wellness apps and more on-site spaces dedicated to stress-reduction.



Children's Dental Health Month

One of the most common diseases among children, tooth decay is also one of the most preventable. And, besides, good oral health routines established in childhood benefit adults throughout their lives. The annual recognition of Children's Dental Health Month seeks to encourage good habits and promote better oral health. Learn more at <http://www.ada.org/publications/ada-news/2021/november/2022-national-childrens-dental-health-month-focuses-on-sealants>.

HARVEST OF THE MONTH: LEEKS

Native to areas around the Mediterranean and prized by ancient cultures, leeks remain table staples in many global cultures. In the U.S., however, they are used sparingly, tending to be associated with finer cuisine and more expensive than their close cousins, onions and garlic.

Those who do cook with leeks, however, find a versatile ingredient that adds a gentler onion flavor to soups and main dishes and can even serve as a stand-alone side.

Sometimes compared to oversized scallions, leeks have a green leafy top and a white stem that will be less bulbous than an onion. Typically freshest when purchased between September and April, the best leeks will have a stem that's one to two inches thick, with dark green tops, no yellow spots and no visible wilting. Avoid leeks with black spots or mushy or discolored areas on the stems.

You can store leeks for as long as a week wrapped in a paper towel in the refrigerator. Don't wash leeks until you're ready



to use them, but then wash them well (they tend to carry a lot of dirt among their leaves). Then you can use them in a variety of ways, including as the starting point for soups, as a flavorful addition to salads, as nice complements to eggs, white meats and fish, or cooked alone as a unique side dish.



Recipe: Potato Leek Soup

Ingredients (6 servings):

3 tablespoons unsalted butter
4 large leeks, white and light green parts only, roughly chopped (about 5 cups)
3 cloves garlic, peeled and smashed
2 pounds Yukon Gold potatoes, peeled and roughly chopped into 1/2-inch pieces
7 cups low sodium chicken or vegetable broth
2 bay leaves
3 sprigs fresh thyme
1 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper
1 cup heavy cream
Chives, finely chopped, for serving

Directions:

Melt butter over medium heat in a large soup pot. Add the leeks and garlic and cook, stirring regularly, until soft and wilted, about 10 minutes. Adjust the heat so ingredients don't brown. Add potatoes, broth, bay leaves, thyme, salt and pepper and bring pot to a boil. Cover and reduce heat to low. Simmer for 15 minutes, or until the potatoes are very soft, then remove thyme sprig and bay leaves before puréeing the soup. Add heavy cream and bring to a simmer. Taste and adjust seasoning with salt and pepper. If soup is too thin, simmer until thickened; if it's too thick, add water or stock to thin it out. Garnish with fresh herbs.

Nutrition Information:

CALORIES: 420; PROTEIN: 11G; CARBOHYDRATES: 47G; FAT: 23G; SODIUM: 512MG; FIBER: 5G; SUGARS: 4G; CHOLESTEROL: 70MG

Sources: Accessed January 3, 2022

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