

## **Health Notes for Families.....**

Parents work hard to create a healthy environment for their kids. In today's world, eating right and being physically active can be challenging even for the most health-conscious family. That's where *Let's Go! "Small Steps For Better Health"* comes in handy.

### ***Eat Breakfast –***

There's ample evidence that the simple act of eating breakfast -- every day -- is a big part of keeping your family healthy! Sure, most of us are in a hurry in the morning, but taking five to ten minutes to prepare and eat breakfast is well worth it. People who eat breakfast usually eat less throughout the day.

- Don't let your kids run out the door on an empty stomach. Fuel 'em up with a healthy breakfast!
- Kids who eat breakfast do better in school, are more likely to participate in physical activities, and tend to eat healthier overall.
- If you don't have time for a big breakfast, encourage your family to eat cereal, a granola bar & fruit or a fruit smoothie.

### ***Make Time for Family Dinner –***

Quite possibly the easiest activity for promoting a healthy family simply requires you to sit and eat with your kids. You get to monitor what they are eating and how much, both important factors in maintaining good health. Plus family meals forge stronger family ties...and, you get to talk together!

- Plan your meals ahead of time.
- When in a pinch for time, make a sandwich, salad or even "breakfast" for dinner!
- Make the family dinner fun. Play simple games – like "guess what I did today", use fun placemats that have fun facts on them - a map of the United States, list of state capitals, science and math facts - as a way of engaging your kids, try adding candles to the tables.
- Turn off the TV so you can focus on your family.
- Encourage your children to help plan and prepare family meals.

### ***Eat More Fruits & Vegetables –***

Try eating a fruit or vegetable at every meal and for snacks. They are important for maintaining good health, and they taste great – fresh, frozen or canned!

Try these ideas:

- At breakfast, add fruit to your cereal or pancakes.
- Pack an apple, orange or grapes as a snack for work.
- Put fruit on the table for easier access.
- Try new fruits and vegetables. After all, variety is the spice of life!
- For extra zest at dinner, add a fruit to your plate.
- Don't forget to add them to your kids' snacks! Try a box of raisins, baby carrots or carrot sticks, an apple or orange.

### *Cut Down on Screen Time –*

Cut recreational screen time to two hours or less every day. The more your children watch, the less active they are.

Visit these websites for more information on helping you keep the TV Off. [The American Academy of Pediatrics](#) or [TV Allowance](#) - a television time manager that lets you easily control how much time children spend watching TV, playing video games and surfing the net.

Make a list of fun activities to do instead of spending time in front of the screen. Some examples include:

- Playing a board game, working on a model, drawing or painting.
- Reading a book or magazine.
- Going to the library.

Set a good example and watch less TV yourself.

### *Be Physically Active –*

The moment you become more physically active you begin to improve your health. Whether it's walking, riding a bike, or jogging, being physically active is good for your heart and it helps burn calories.

Kids should be active for at least one hour a day. An easy way to get sixty minutes is to divide the hour into shorter periods throughout the day. And check out our [physical activity](#) page for some fun ways to be active with your kids!

- Be a role model and become more active yourself.
- Make physical activity fun by participating with your kids.
- Choose physical activity-oriented toys & games, like jump ropes, hula hoops, and balls.
- Choose fun, seasonal activities.
- Encourage your child to try a new sport or join a team.
- Go for a family walk.
- When you're out shopping, take the stairs instead of the elevator or escalator.
- Take your kids to the park or playground.
- Play ball (basketball, catch, soccer).
- Go for a bike ride.
- Take a nature hike.

### *Drink Water or Low Fat Milk –*

When you're thirsty, try water or low-fat milk as the drink of choice.

#### *The health benefits of water:*

Sixty percent of your weight on average is made up of water. Every system in your body depends on water. And lack of water can lead to dehydration, and sometimes make you "feel" hungry when you're actually thirsty.

- The average adult should have a little more than eight cups a day to replace the amount of water lost every day.
- If you exercise, you will need roughly one or two cups extra, for short bursts of exercise.

*The health benefits of milk:*

Children ages 4-8 years should be consuming three 8 oz. servings of milk or other dairy products every day. Children 9-18 should consume around four to five 8 oz. servings.

- Milk helps build and protect your teeth and bones.

Tips to drink more water and milk:

- Keep bottled water or a water bottle on hand.
- Add fresh lemon, lime, or orange wedges to water to add flavor.
- Try flavored milks that are low-fat.
- Send water to school with your kids instead of juice as their snack drink.
- Try keeping a pitcher of water in the refrigerator - lots of kids love cold water.

*(Excerpt from Let's Go! 5-2-1-0 Presents "Small Steps For Better Health", March 2009)*

KNOX COUNTY  
**Community  
Health**  
*Coalition*

