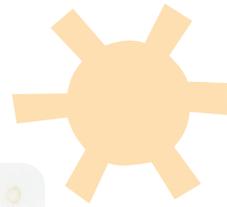


# HEALTH <sup>4kids</sup> MATTERS Today Counts Project

This project was made possible by funds received from the Illinois Department of Public Health.



This booklet and related training were developed in partnership with the HealthMatters Community Academic Partnership and made possible by funds received from the Illinois Department of Public Health.

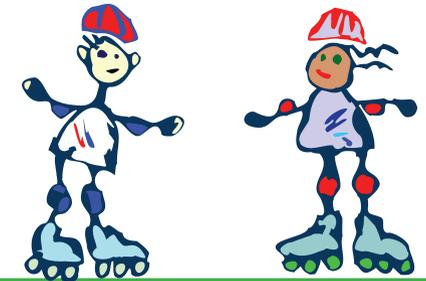
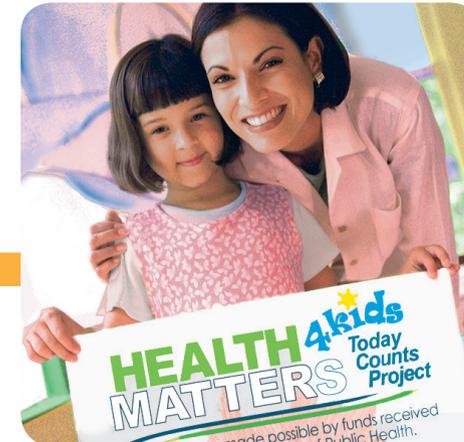


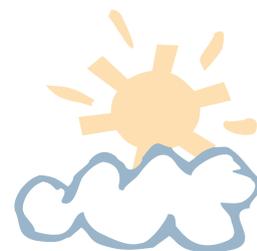
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## Today Counts: for healthy tomorrows

*Preventing diabetes and other chronic conditions*



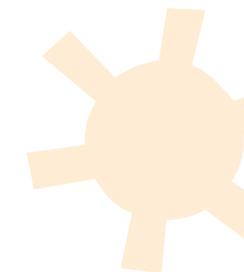


Eat Smart  
Move More  
+ Stress Less  
= A Healthy Life

### Being healthy and staying healthy

... means maintaining a well balanced lifestyle that includes eating a healthy diet, exercising regularly, and taking time to relax.

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## Introduction

Children and teenagers with disabilities often do not get to learn how to eat smart, move more, and cope with stress. With obesity and diabetes on the rise for both children and adults, lowering the risk of diabetes during childhood is critical. **Today counts!** Children and teenagers with disabilities can, in fact, be and stay healthy.

This booklet covers common barriers for children and adolescents with disabilities in choosing foods, being physically active, and coping with stress. Ideas are also provided to change the conversation among health-care providers, parents, and teachers and to encourage children and adolescents to eat smart, move more, and stress less.



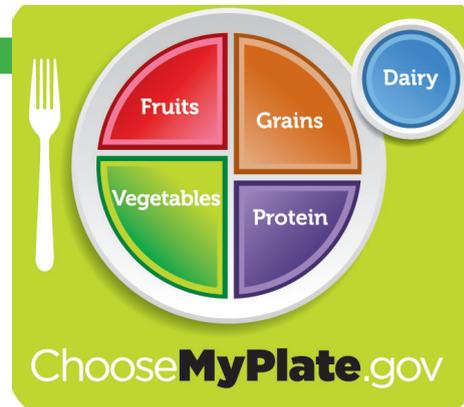
## EAT SMART

### Eating Smart is a Balancing Act

Foods are generally not unhealthy—but many diets are. Eating smart includes sufficient water, a balanced diet, and food variety. Learning to choose foods rich in vitamins, minerals, and fibers supports lifelong health. This is especially important during childhood when children are growing, learning, and developing lifelong habits.

### Get Your Plate in Shape

Healthy eating means eating a balance of bread, potatoes, cereals, fruits, vegetables, milk, meat, fish and milk/meat alternatives while eating a minimum quantity of fat and sugar. Fill half of your plate with produce—colorful vegetables and fruits. Fill a quarter of your plate with a healthy source of protein, such as fish, poultry, beans, or nuts. Save a quarter of your plate for whole grains.



### Healthy Lifelong Living

Foods can shape how we grow, how we feel, and even whether we make good decisions. A healthful diet can protect us from sickness and disease, improve emotional well-being, and support healthy weight management and a longer lifespan. Most importantly, eating smart can bring pleasure—good foods taste good!

## GOOD PRACTICES TO FOLLOW

### Family and Caregivers

- Involve children in meal planning and meal preparation
- Enjoy food—it's okay
- Model good food choices
- Make family meals a priority
- Learn how to eat healthy
- Plan meals ahead of time
- Include a variety of foods in meal plans
- Plan your portions
- Think of water as a food group
- Remember breakfast
- Make eating an enjoyable social event
- Snack on fruits and vegetables

### Educators

- Remove food rewards from your toolbox
- Weave health topics into all subjects
- Include a health promotion curriculum
- Develop a school community garden
- Think healthy snack machines and cafeterias

### Health Care Practitioners

- Think health promotion and disease prevention during office visits
- Educate individuals and caregivers
- Help families create strategies for healthy eating
- Develop a simple individual care plan



**Advocacy Matters**  
People with disabilities often get chronic health conditions earlier, leading to more complicated, prolonged treatment and support.

*DeJong, 1997*

## MOVE MORE

### Physical Activity is for everyBODY

Physical activity is any form of movement or exercise of the body that uses energy. Regular physical activity and exercise helps the body's systems function more efficiently. It reduces risk of heart disease, diabetes, and many other diseases, and is a good way to manage weight. Physical activity is one of the most important things to do to stay healthy.

### Start Early for Lifelong Habits

Children with disabilities must be included and acknowledged when it concerns their health— physical activity is for everyBODY regardless of disability. For children and adolescents, physical activity includes play, games, sports, chores, recreation, physical education, and planned exercise with family, in school, and in community activities. The earlier children learn to be physically active, the more likely they will become active adults.



### Building Healthy Bodies and Well-Being

Yes, physical activity like exercise and daily activity improves our health, strength, flexibility, and mood. But the benefits of physical activity go way beyond how we move and feel. With regular physical activity, children and adolescents can become more knowledgeable about their bodies and learn to make informed choices about their health. Physical activity can also improve self-esteem, social development, and healthy relationships.

## GOOD PRACTICES TO FOLLOW

### Family and Caregivers

- Get your children involved in community activities that encourage movement
- Be a positive role model by being active
- Know your rights! Physical Education is a federally mandated component of special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
- Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 states that no individual shall be excluded because of a disability from programs that receive federal funds
- Limit the amount of time spent watching television
- Make exercise fun and play an hour each day



### Social Support Matters

Health professionals, parents, and teachers can advocate for adapted physical education and recreation in individualized education plans for children with disabilities.

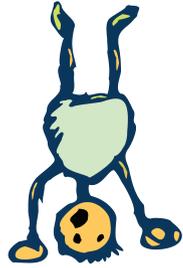
### Educators

- Encourage exercise and physical activity whenever possible
- Teach the benefits of exercise
- Allocate time out of the school day to be physically active
- Advocate for physical education and recreation in Individualized Education Plans (IEPs)

### Health Care Practitioners

- Provide goal-directed activity "prescriptions"
- Advocate for physical education and recreation in IEPs
- Share resources in your community that promote physical activity
- Provide patient education describing the benefits of exercise in easy English or plain language
- Be sure to have accessible exam tables and weight scales
- Provide body mass index (BMI) information

## STRESS LESS



### Good Stress or Bad Stress?

Stress is a part of everyone's life. Short-term stress can sometimes be good and help provide motivation. Ongoing stress can wear the body down and lead to serious health problems. Children and adolescents with disabilities often experience physical, social, and emotional stress in their daily lives. This is further complicated by the lack of recognition or the lack of action in addressing daily stressors.



### Stress Less Now

Stress can be managed in many ways. *Taking charge* is the first step, and *learning stress-reduction strategies* that work is second. Identifying and understanding stressors that children and adolescents experience can help them to understand the effect that stressors have on their bodies and minds. Education and advocacy are two valuable tools for coping with stress and stressors—children and adolescents can learn to either change the situation or change the reaction. Making time for fun and relaxation is important too!



### Feel Better Later

Each person is unique, so some stress-management strategies will be more helpful than others, and some will require practice to work. Taking steps to manage stress helps the body and mind, and, offers protection from serious health problems like diabetes and depression.

## GOOD PRACTICES TO FOLLOW

### Family and Caregivers

- Talk to your child about stress
- Identify relaxation techniques
- Be physically active every day
- Include exercise activities in daily routine
- Seek a mentor for your child
- Get enough sleep
- Create a journal

### Educators

- Provide advocacy education
- Watch for signs of bullying
- Promote positive peer relations
- Teach relaxation strategies
- Participate in a yoga routine

### Health Care Practitioners

- Ask about stressors
- Determine the triggers for stress
- Provide relaxation information
- Recommend music therapy as a coping tool
- Provide referrals



### Attitudes Matter

**Health professionals often focus on the medical conditions relating to the disability and exclude preventative and promotive health services for people with disabilities.**

*Krahn et al., 2006.*



## Facts

People with disabilities should consult their health care provider before increasing their level of physical activity or starting a new exercise.

Physical activity need not be strenuous to achieve health benefits.

People with disabilities are less likely to engage in regular, moderate physical activity than people without disabilities, yet they have similar needs to promote their health and prevent unnecessary disease.

People who can maintain a regular routine of physical activity that is of longer duration or of greater intensity are likely to derive greater benefit from that exercise.



## Resources

- American Association on Health and Disability: [www.aahd.us](http://www.aahd.us)
- American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities: [www.aamr.org](http://www.aamr.org)
- HealthMatters Community Academic Partnership: [www.Healthmattersprogram.org](http://www.Healthmattersprogram.org)
- Illinois Provider Directory for Children, Youth and Young Adults with Special Healthcare Needs: [www.illinoisproviderdirectory.com](http://www.illinoisproviderdirectory.com)
- Illinois Department of Public Health: [www.idph.state.il.us](http://www.idph.state.il.us)
- National Center on Health, Physical Activity and Disability (NCHPAD): [www.ncpad.org](http://www.ncpad.org) (Grant Number: 1U59DD000906)
- The Arc: [www.thearc.org](http://www.thearc.org)



## Did You Know?



**Flexibility Aerobics Balance Strength  
...make You Feel Fabulous!**

For more information, please visit:  
[www.healthmattersprogram.org](http://www.healthmattersprogram.org)



### You Matter

**Individuals with intellectual disabilities must often contact as many as fifty physicians before they can find one trained to treat them.**

*Corbin et al., 2005*

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