

## Your health

By Raising Children Network

Your health is as important as your children's. It's what allows you to take care of them. Yet, with all the focus on looking after a child or baby, lots of parents forget or run out of time to look after themselves.

- If you look after your health, being a parent can be easier and more enjoyable.
- Most people find that it helps if they watch their diet and try to get 30 minutes of exercise every day.
- It's worth remembering that eating well need not cost you a lot.

Being a parent is much easier if you're feeling well. Keeping healthy can stop your day-to-day emotions from seesawing too far, and an active lifestyle contributes to general happiness.

The keys are to:

- balance what you eat and drink so that you have plenty of energy
- move, move, move every day to stay physically healthy.

### Physical health – tips for parents

Parents are least likely to exercise compared with people in the broader community, according to latest research. When you're tired you want to rest every chance you get, but activity can increase your energy levels and make you feel better.

For parents who are short on time, the easiest way is to fit physical activity into everyday activities. A walk with your child; splashing about at the local creek; kicking a ball together in the park; walking to the supermarket for a few items instead of driving. Even a tango with the vacuum cleaner, if that's what you enjoy!

Movement is what matters: 30 minutes or so a day, according to experts. Even little amounts of physical activity that add up to 30 minutes will lift your energy. And fitting in some regular vigorous exercise will help boost your health.

There are three other good reasons to stay active:

- Social enjoyment (catching up and playing sport or going for a walk with others).
- [Relaxation](#).
- Personal satisfaction with your fitness or appearance.

Read more on the website [National Physical Activity Guidelines for Australians](#).

### Your diet – thinking ahead

Your diet gives you the energy you need during the day and keeps your body nourished so that it runs at peak.

Preparing balanced meals might sound like a big ask during the first chaotic weeks and months of parenthood. Our [faster food tips](#) can help you save time and still have a [balanced diet](#).

Nutrition for adults

Once you get a feel for which foods provide the protein, vitamins and minerals you need, it's easy to balance what you eat from each category.

Your body needs:

- **Carbohydrates** like potatoes, rice and bread for energy.
- Regular sources of **protein** like meat, fish and legumes to repair tissues and keep your body in good condition.
- Vitamins for your immune system and overall health.
- Essential minerals such as iron, calcium and zinc for your body's chemical processes and growth.
- Foods containing **phytochemicals** to help protect against various diseases.

Plenty of fluids will also prevent dehydration, which can make you feel even more tired and lethargic. Drinking water is the purest, simplest and cheapest source: eight glasses a day is the recommended amount. Drinks with alcohol and caffeine actually take fluid out of your system. If you have these, try to top up with an extra glass of water.

### Faster food tips

Try our tips for saving time and preparing healthy meals quickly – without being a gourmet cook.

Quick meal ideas

- Meals such as fresh pasta with vegetables or a salad can be prepared in a few minutes and give your body a real boost.
- Fruit, vegetable sticks, cheese, yoghurt and muesli bars all make for healthy, easy snacks to grab when you are busy with baby.
- Cans and packets of soup are a good backup for lunch or snacks.
- Frozen foods can be great shortcuts for healthy, tasty and nutritious meals.
- If you do run out of ingredients and energy, look for takeaway food that is still healthy, like a stir-fry with rice and vegetables.

Pantry food ideas for quick meals

- Keep long-life vegetables such as potatoes, carrots and onions.
- For energy, store dried pasta and other sources of carbohydrate, like rice, dry noodles, lentils and couscous.
- Keep dried foods like pine nuts, sun-dried tomatoes and shiitake mushrooms.
- Nuts such as almonds and cashews are a great source of protein and can be eaten as snacks or part of a full meal, but try to avoid the salted or fried ones.
- Tinned tomatoes, tomato paste, corn and other foods can be a lifesaver for one-pot dishes such as pasta sauces, soups and casseroles.
- Canned meats and fish, such as tuna, salmon, ham and sardines, and tinned legumes, are

good sources of protein.

- Soup in cans or packets makes an instant hot meal.
- Keep condiments such as tomato sauce, mustard, mayonnaise, soy, chili or relish to give extra zest to quick snacks.
- Use ready-made stocks to add instant flavour to fast meals.

#### Healthy frozen food ideas

- Frozen vegetables, which retain a lot of nutritional goodness.
- Meat products like steak, mince, sausages and chicken. Try to freeze meat without bones.
- Grated cheese for homemade pizzas and other dishes.
- Bread and pastries.

#### Food preparation ideas

- Cook for two nights instead of one, or freeze portions for another time.
- Keep leftovers for snacks and toasted sandwiches.
- Save on washing up by cooking one-pot meals such as soups, curries and casseroles.
- Cook smaller chunks of food faster to save time.
- Prepare food the night before if you have the time and energy.

Rated ★★★★★ (5 ratings)

#### More to explore

- New parents: eating and drinking
- Fitness for all ages

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#### References

Department of Health and Aged Care. (1998). *The Australian guide to healthy eating*. Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.

National Health and Medical Research Council (2003). *Dietary guidelines for children and adolescents in Australia*. Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.

## GLOSSARY