DEVELOPING A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE

The benefits of children’s healthy living habits are well documented. Healthy kids learn better, have more positive social interactions and have greater potential for success in life.

Children learn what they live so the best place to learn about a healthy lifestyle is at home. The family is the strongest presence in the life of a child, so the habits that a child practices at home become the foundation for life as a teenager and beyond. The school can teach children about good health but the lessons have more strength when practised at home each day.

Parents and caregivers can encourage children to be more active by having them participate in family activities as well as sports. Following are some ideas you can use to keep your kids healthy:

- **Limit the amount of children’s television, computer and electronic games usage to a maximum of two hours a day.** Very little physical exertion is needed to watch TV or use other electronic equipment so for the sake of fitness their use of these needs to be limited. One third of Australian children would prefer to play computer games than play outside so parents may have to be assertive and, at times, over-zealous but so be it.
- **Encourage children to walk and play outside.** Most children would get their required minimum two hours of exercise a week by walking or riding their bikes to school. This is a contentious issue but a recent poll revealed that 60 per cent of Australian 6 – 13 year olds would like to walk to school but only 30 per cent actually do.
- **Keep unhealthy food out of the trolley and include more fruit.** As keepers of the family purse parents have the main stake in what food goes in and what stays out of the shopping trolley. Only 43 per cent of Australian children eat fruit after school so more fruit could be a good place to start.
- **Parents play with their children or join them in a physical activity.** It should be easy for adults to sell their children on the virtues of playing physical games outside as play comes before work in most children’s dictionaries.
- **Make sure you and your children get sufficient sleep.** Choose a reasonable bedtime that allows for nine to 12 hours sleep for a school-aged child – some teens need even more sleep than a young child!

Do as I do not as I say is the idea here. It is little use parents telling their kids to go out and play as they tuck into their second wine or they slump onto the couch. Modelling is the most important tool in the armoury if we want children to develop sustained healthy eating and exercise habits.

Michael Gross- Parenting Ideas