

# Checklist for a Healthier Lifestyle

*This is a list of suggestions you can use to try to improve your health habits.*

**Try the following:** Choose two or three steps to focus on. Once those steps have become part of your daily life, add another new step.

- Drink lots (8 glasses a day) of water!** Water is the fuel your body needs. Keeping bottles of water around the house and in your backpack makes this easier.
- Eat breakfast.** Skipping breakfast tells your body to store calories as fat instead of burning them up. You definitely do better in school when you eat breakfast. Start your day with whole grain toast, hard-boiled eggs, nonfat or low fat yogurt or cheese, a piece of fruit, or oatmeal.
- Take your own lunch to school.** Make your own lunch the night before. A simple sandwich (with lean deli meat, lettuce, and mustard) with a piece of fruit and/or some veggies and a bottle of water is nutritious and quick to make. Your own lunch can be healthier and better tasting than school lunches.
- Learn to make your own healthy snacks and meals.** Help prepare meals with the person that does most of the cooking in your house. This will give you some control over what you eat.
- Eat dinner with your family at a regular time.** Studies show that families who eat together eat healthier. Remember to turn off the TV while at the dinner table. Instead, find out how everyone's day was.
- Eat more fiber.** Eat whole grain bread and bran cereals instead of white bread and sugar cereals. Fiber helps you digest your food and it also makes you feel satisfied.
- Eat more fruits and vegetables.** Have at least 3-5 servings of vegetables and 2-3 servings of fruit each day and eat whole fruit rather than drinking juice.
- Drink nonfat or 1% milk.** Drinking milk builds strong bones (calcium and vitamins). If you are lactose intolerant, you can get just as much calcium by drinking lactose-free milk or soy milk, or taking Lactaid tablets when you eat dairy.
- Cut down on soda, juice drinks, sports drinks, chips, and candy.** These are empty calories with no nutritional value. Did you know that a 20-oz. soda has almost 20 teaspoons of sugar? Too much soda can make your bones thinner and more breakable, and can cause dental cavities.
- Reduce fast food.** If you want fast food, make it a special treat and don't "super size". Once you cut down on fast food, you'll find that you won't really miss it.
- Pick a new physical activity.** It is important that you pick an activity that you enjoy. For example, join a sports team or league, go fast walking in a group every day, or rent and workout with an exercise video/DVD from the public library. Stick with it for 4-6 weeks because this is how long it takes to form a new habit. **Remember: Exercise is as important as what you eat.**
- Cut back on TV/video game/computer time.** Try to watch or play less than 1-2 hours of TV/computer/video games a day—even during holidays, weekends, and summer vacations. Get rid of your remote controls. *Every little bit helps!*
- Do fun things with your friends other than eating.** Eating is a fun social activity but do other activities with your friends besides eating. Try walking to and from places together.
- Go food shopping.** Once you learn how to make healthy food choices, go to the store and pick out nutritious foods. But remember: It is a bad idea to go food shopping when you are hungry. You'll be tempted to buy junk food.
- Notice what causes you to over or under eat** or eat a lot of junk food. Try different ways of dealing with those situations such as calling a friend, talking to a trusted adult, exercising, listening to music, slow deep breathing, and taking a walk or running in place.
- Brush and floss your teeth.** It's important to take good care of your teeth and gums. Try to brush at least two times a day and floss at least once a day.
- Make a list** of 3-4 important food or activity reminders and put them up where you're most likely to see them, like the refrigerator, bathroom, or near your bed.

## THINGS TO REMEMBER

- ▶ The goal is to be more active, have fun, feel good about yourself, and to eat well.
- ▶ Get friends and family to help. It definitely works better when you partner with someone else to make changes in the way you eat or exercise.
- ▶ **You are NOT on a diet!** A "diet" usually means only a short-term change and generally isn't something that is healthy.
- ▶ Limiting foods just doesn't work and causes you to crave "forbidden" food more often. The goal is to maintain healthy eating and exercise habits as a regular part of life. Avoid over and under eating and find a place somewhere in between.
- ▶ **Last BUT NOT least:** Avoid short-term goals because nothing changes overnight. There will be times when it will be rough to stick to the changes you've decided to make. This is okay. Lifestyle change is very difficult for everyone, so try to remain positive and congratulate yourself for the changes you make. **Hang in there and take one day at a time!**<sup>13</sup>



<sup>13</sup> Adapted from Daniel Delgado, County of Santa Clara