

Keeping kids active, eating healthy hard for parents during pandemic

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The pandemic has cut kids off from friends, nutritious school meals, sports and routines. With virtual learning and few activities outside the home, it's no surprise kids are moving less and snacking more.

If your family has been eating more processed, high-calorie food and spends a lot of time on screens, you are not alone.

The pandemic has put more children at risk of obesity, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics. Children with obesity are more likely to have problems if they are infected with COVID-19.

The virus can affect children's breathing, immune system, metabolism and cause inflammation. Those with obesity also can develop high blood pressure, liver problems or diabetes. Having these health issues puts them at high risk if they get COVID-19.

Black and Hispanic children and children living in places with high poverty rates are more at risk of obesity and COVID-19 illness.

Many parents are struggling to make sure their kids eat healthy foods, stay active and stick to a regular bedtime. If your situation seems too hard or you are worried about your child's weight gain in the past year, seek help. Your child's pediatrician can provide:

- counseling for mental health issues or substance use,
- screening for eating disorders,
- help managing stress, and

- a personalized plan to manage obesity.

Eating well and exercising can help children cope with stress and stay healthy. Parents can support healthy eating habits by offering their children a lot of fruit and vegetables, creating a schedule for meals and snacks, and keeping healthy food in your home. Motivate kids to get moving by limiting their screen time after they are done with virtual learning for the day. Model healthy habits by making sure you eat well and exercise, too.

To find information on food, housing, child care and other support, call 2-1-1 or visit 211.org.

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