



# healthy LIFESTYLES

*Aloina is packing up after dinner with her extended family. Everyone has enjoyed the traditional foods and the takeaway treats brought by her uncle. Aloina's family, including her son Pita, is now watching a video. She knows that kids at school are picking on Pita because of his size. She's heard about healthy lifestyles on TV and wonders if cutting down on some foods would be a good start.*

*Exercise builds strong bodies,  
makes us feel positive  
and helps us to enjoy life.*

Aloina is ready to make the changes needed for a healthier future for her family.

Eating the right food is important. So is doing a bit of exercise every day. Doing both helps us feel good about ourselves and to get the most out of life.

Kids learn from what we do. By making the best choices now, we can help our children to become healthy adults. The food we eat and the amount of exercise we do has a big impact on our kids.

## Food in our culture

Food has a central place in Pacific culture. Sharing meals with extended family and friends is a way to show love. It's a positive aspect of traditional life that Pacific families have taken with them to Australia

However, the food we eat could be better. High fat dishes such as chicken with the skin on, coconut milk, tinned meat and processed foods are often on the table. Our diet is heavy on taro, kumara and potatoes. These vegetables give us energy but, if eaten in large quantities, can lead to weight gain. Many Pacific families also like takeaway foods that are high in fat and salt.

The result of eating fatty and energy-rich foods is that many Pacific kids, like their friends from other cultures, are getting too big. In fact, the need for many Australian kids to lose weight is now a national issue.

## What are good foods?

We need different sorts of food each day to keep a healthy body weight. Children and adults also need to drink plenty of fluids – with water the healthiest (and cheapest) and best choice by far.

### *Eat most*

Foods we should eat most of are:

- fresh fruit and vegetables
- cereals, bread, pasta, noodles, rice and sago.

Brown and whole grain bread and brown rice are much better than the white varieties. Fresh fruit has vitamins that promote good health and is much better than fruit juice drinks that may have added sugar.

### *Eat moderately*

We need to eat moderate amounts of:

- milk, cheese and yoghurt – go for low fat products for all adults and all children two years and older
- either fresh or canned fish
- chicken with the skin off
- lean meat
- eggs
- dried beans and peas
- raw and unsalted nuts.

### *Eat least*

We should limit how much we eat:

- sugar
- butter and margarine
- oils.

## Shopping for food

Include fresh fruit and vegetables on your list as an important part of healthy food shopping. Packaged food can be healthy and convenient but you need to choose carefully. Food labels tell us a lot about what is inside the package.

For example, next time you go to the supermarket, look for:

- 'light' on the label of dairy products, coconut milk, packaged ham and other products. These labels show the food contains a reduced amount of fat as do the labels 'low fat', 'reduced fat' and 'fat free'
- 'no added sugar' on drinks and tinned or packaged goods. Products without extra sugar are better than products with added sugar
- 'no added salt' on products including tinned vegetables.

## Preparing and serving food

After buying good food for our family, we need to prepare it in a healthy way. Preparation is important because our kids usually learn to cook by watching us. By using healthy cooking methods we set them on the path to life-long good eating. Involve your kids in cooking. When you're in the kitchen, ask them to do little things like peeling vegetables or getting ingredients out of the fridge. Older kids can prepare simple dishes with supervision.

To prepare good meals:

- cut the fat off meat, including boiled beef and chicken
- take off chicken skin
- bake, grill, boil or steam food. If doing a stir-fry, use a small amount of oil
- limit deep frying
- use healthy oils for cooking like canola, safflower, sunflower, soybean, sesame and olive oil
- serve fewer dishes with coconut milk and always use fat-reduced brands
- use salad dressings and mayonnaise sparingly
- reduce how much salt you put in the cooking.

And when setting the table:

- cut the fat off meat, including boiled beef and chicken
- leave the salt shaker in the cupboard.

## Snacks and rewards

Snacks can taste good and be good for us too. When kids come home from school or need a boost after sport, give them snacks such as:

- fresh fruit like banana or paw paw
  - low-fat yoghurt
  - fruit smoothies
  - dry, unsalted biscuits with cheese
  - toasted brown bread with fresh tomato or avocado
  - corn on the cob.
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Like many other parents in Australia, Pacific parents often reward kids with food. Chips, biscuits, sweets, takeaways and sweet drinks are popular but can be unhealthy choices.

Try rewarding your kids another way. Tell them how pleased you are with what they've done or spend extra time with them on an activity they enjoy. Next time the kids make you proud, give them a different sort of treat and pass up on the hot chips. Over time, your kids will learn that a reward does not have to mean food.

*Parents play a big part in keeping (their kids) active, particularly in their teenage years.*

## Start being active

To be healthy, everyone needs to exercise. Exercise builds strong bodies, makes us feel positive and helps us to enjoy life. Doctors and dietitians recommend we should have at least 30 minutes of moderate to vigorous exercise a day.

The problem for parents is that life is very busy. It can be hard enough working, looking after the kids and doing the normal household chores. Kids are busy too and TV offers a convenient way to relax.

A good way to start exercising is with activities like walking that we can fit in easily with our normal routine and do together as a family. Depending on the distance, walk the kids to school each day, walk to church on Sunday instead of driving the car and take the kids for a walk to the local shops when there's something extra needed for dinner. If children can make walking a habit, they'll have fewer medical problems later like diabetes or heart disease.

Play ballgames at home with the kids in the backyard or put on a CD and dance. Encouraging your kids to help with chores at home – and praising them when they do – is another good idea. They can do anything that involves lifting, carrying, bending and stretching and is within safe physical limits for kids their age.

Outside the house there are heaps of activities you can do as a family:

- go to the beach or the swimming pool
- throw or kick around a ball at the local sports oval
- slam dunk at the basketball hoop down at the park
- teach the little ones how to use the public play equipment
- hire bikes and get out on the cycle paths.

Local community centres, churches and sporting groups run organised activities for children and teenagers. Most of these activities cost very little.

Find out what's on offer and encourage the kids to sign up for something they're interested in. Both individual sports and team sports are good. Some kids will be more interested in team games, some more interested in individual sports. Whichever they do, they will be learning new physical skills and getting fitter. The discipline needed for sports will also help them cope better with life in general.

Once the kids are involved in these activities, parents play a big part in keeping them active, particularly in their teenage years. This is when many kids see sport as uncool and want to drop out. You can help by watching your kids play sport and praising them when they go up a grade or enter a new competition. In sharing their interest in sport, you'll share a bigger slice of their life than you would otherwise have been able to do.

With eating better and exercising, you can begin to make small changes to your family's routine and build up from there. Why not start today?

For more information

see the *Australian Guide to Healthy Eating* at [www.health.gov.au/internet/wcms/Publishing.nsf/Content/health-publth-strateg-food-guide-index.htm](http://www.health.gov.au/internet/wcms/Publishing.nsf/Content/health-publth-strateg-food-guide-index.htm)

