WHY YOUR CHILD’S WEIGHT MATTERS
Your weight, your health series
Introduction
Parents can do a lot to help their children maintain a healthy weight. This depends on both healthy eating and physical activity. This booklet provides practical tips that parents can use to help their families stay healthy and some information on the National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP).

Weighing and measuring in schools
Children in Reception and Year 6 are now having their height and weight measured in schools as part of the NCMP, which takes place every year. If you have a child in one of these years, you should receive a letter with more information about the programme in your child’s school. Trained staff, such as a school nurse, will weigh and measure your child. Care is taken to ensure that this is done in a sensitive manner and your child’s results will not be disclosed to teachers or other children. Though your child does not have to participate, we do urge you to encourage your child to take part.

Why is this information being collected?
The NCMP is part of a national effort to improve children’s health and wellbeing. The NCMP will allow us to find out more about the way children are growing in England. The information will enable local health services to know how best to use resources for children’s health.

Once your child’s height and weight have been recorded, your local NHS primary care trust (PCT) will hold the information along with some other details, including your child’s date of birth and school. The PCT will send this information securely to the Department of Health, with details that could identify your child (such as name and date of birth) removed.
The Department of Health will analyse this anonymous information to look at trends in children’s height and weight across England. It will publish the findings every year in a report.

**Why is it important that my child takes part?**
Every child measured is contributing to the national picture about how children are growing. The more children that participate, the clearer that picture will be.

**How do I find out my child’s height and weight?**
You should receive a letter from your PCT giving you the chance to request feedback of your child’s results. If you do not know which is your local PCT, you should ask your child’s school nurse or visit www.nhs.uk/servicedirectories.

**Why is a healthy weight important?**
We know that children are generally getting heavier and that is bad news for their health and wellbeing – especially as they get older.

Children who are overweight are more likely to develop diabetes or other diseases in later life and are more likely to be obese as adults.
But health is not the only issue; overweight children could be affected by:

- teasing or bullying;
- low self-esteem;
- embarrassment when playing games or sports; or
- difficulty in being active (e.g., getting breathless quickly).

The best thing that you can do is to help your child develop healthy eating habits and be more physically active. Children who see their parents, grandparents and carers following a healthy, active lifestyle tend to learn by example. These habits become a normal part of everyday life. Establishing good habits and routines early on will improve a child’s quality of life in both the short and long term.

If you are concerned that your child might be underweight or overweight, speak to your GP, school nurse or health visitor. If you would like help interpreting your child’s height and weight, please visit the online calculator at: www.direct.gov.uk/childweight

Healthy eating for children
It is not a good idea to count calories or severely restrict food for children. Eating regular sit-down meals as a family, limiting high-calorie snacks and sugar-rich drinks, and trying to avoid ‘food on the run’ will help get your child into good eating habits for life. Resist the temptation to give your child sweets and chocolate for rewards or comfort.
Most overweight children do not need to diet and they may not even need to lose weight. As overweight children grow taller, aim to keep their weight about the same. That means they grow into their ideal weight as they get taller.

Even if your child is not overweight or obese, it is important that they eat healthily and are physically active. The tips here are relevant to all children, no matter what their weight.

Every day, all children should aim to eat:
- five or more servings of a variety of fruit and vegetables (fruit with breakfast and for snacks, and some vegetables, salad or fruit at every mealtime) – visit www.5aday.nhs.uk;
- meals that are based on starchy foods, eg potatoes, pasta, rice, bread, breakfast cereal or other cereal;
- lower-fat dairy products – milk, yoghurt, fromage frais or cheese (once children are over five); and
- protein-rich foods – poultry, fish, eggs, beans, pulses and lentils.

Savoury and sweet snacks (like crisps, biscuits and chocolate) and sugary drinks should be kept to a minimum. Try giving chopped-up fruit as an alternative.

**Healthy eating habits at home and school**

To help your child adopt healthy eating habits, start them at a young age. Many schools are taking part in the National Healthy Schools Programme and all schools now have to meet new nutritional standards for school food. This means that schools should only offer healthy food choices. Getting them to eat healthier options at home will be consistent with what they get at school and help them towards healthier eating habits.
Try to do as many of these as you can:

- sit together as a family to eat your meal;
- switch the television off when you are eating;
- eat a balanced choice of healthy foods yourself and be positive about them;
- encourage the family to try new foods;
- encourage and praise ‘good eating’ instead of nagging about bad eating habits; and
- involve children in food preparation.

Active children

All children should aim to be active for at least one hour every day. It’s a good idea to limit screen time (computer or television) to a maximum of two hours a day, and possibly less for young children.

Help your children find activities they enjoy. For most children, playing in the playground or park or running around outside can be great fun – whatever the weather. Try to incorporate physical activity into your everyday family life – walking, cycling and outdoor play should be part of this.

A variety of activity is important to help children develop strong bones, muscle strength and flexibility. Activity can be natural and spontaneous (in the playground, playing outside), planned (walking, cycling to school) or school sport. Remember to praise your children when they take part or are active and do not criticise them if they are not as able as other children.
Further information is available at:
www.eatwell.gov.uk/agesandstages/children
www.parentlineplus.org.uk
www.schoolfoodtrust.org.uk
### On the move

Here are some ideas to help your children achieve one hour of activity a day, in addition to their PE and school sport.

#### WITH PARENTS
- Walking, cycling or scootering to school
- Walking bus to school
- Kicking a football in the park
- Walking the dog
- Obstacle courses
- Walks with a picnic in a park or the countryside
- Rounders
- Fruit picking
- Visits to city farms
- Nature trails
- Trips to the local playground
- Bike rides
- Playing frisbee
- Running
- Walking to the shops

#### IN THE LOCAL PLAYGROUND OR PARK
- Tag
- Hopscotch
- Hula hoop
- Hide and seek
- Skipping
- Football
- Playing frisbee
- Running
- Skipping
- Cricket
- Skateboarding
- Rollerblading

#### ATĐT HOME
- Indoor soft play
- Dancing to music or with a dance mat

#### AT LOCAL OUTDOOR COURTS
- Basketball
- Netball
- Tennis

### AT THE LEISURE CENTRE
- Swimming
- Gymnastics
- Trampolining
- Badminton
- Climbing walls
- Dancing

### FURTHER INFORMATION IS AVAILABLE AT
- www.playgroundfun.org.uk
- www.activeplaces.com

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**NHS**

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DH Publications Orderline 08701 555 455
E-mail: dh@prolog.uk.com

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