

# Six tips for parents to create a healthful environment

Many parents need to clean up the food and physical activity environment at home to help children manage their weight, says David Ludwig, director of the Optimal Weight for Life Program at Children's Hospital in Boston.

He and his staff have treated 5,000 overweight children during the past 12 years. He knows losing weight is a struggle for many families.

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"Ultimately we need concerted action by the government to detoxify the environment outside the home — regulating junk food ads to kids, improving the quality of the school lunch program, providing funding for regular physical education classes and after-school recreational opportunities," says Ludwig, author of *Ending the Food Fight*, which provides a nine-week weight-loss program for families. But until then, "parents must take control of what happens within the home." His suggestions:

## 1. Stock up on good food

Fill your house with foods that are both delicious and nutritious (fruits, vegetables, whole grains, nuts, beans, fish, lean protein, reduced-fat dairy products) and don't bring home junk food such as cookies, cakes, sweetened cereals and sugary drinks.

## 2. Make sweets a treat

Save treats for special occasions. You don't have to give up sweets entirely, but go out for them instead of having them at home, he says.

## 3. Ditch the drive-through

Avoid fast food, he says. Ludwig did a study that showed overweight teens consume about 400 more calories on a day when they consume fast food compared with a day in which they don't.

## 4. Turn off the TV

Make physical activity the focus of the home instead of television. Don't allow TVs in the kitchen or bedrooms.

## 5. Equip for exercise

Give older children the basic tools to be active: jump ropes, balls, baseball gloves, Frisbees.

## 6. Shake it!

Encourage them to dance. Dancing is an excellent activity, he says. "Kids love to dance in a non-judgmental setting. When they are having fun, they are not thinking about it as exercise."