

## NUTRITION

Heart disease is rarely a top concern for parents of elementary aged children. After all, heart attacks are something that only happen to middle-aged and older folks, right? Unfortunately, today's kids are developing high blood pressure and high cholesterol levels -- serious risk factors for heart disease in later years. For example, the American Heart Association points out that approximately 10 percent of adolescents between the ages of 12 and 19 have high total cholesterol levels -- over 200 mg/dl. Make sure your kids lead a heart-healthy life.

The diet, exercise and lifestyle habits that your kids develop as youngsters can directly affect their hearts in later years. Get active. The more time a kid spends in front of the television or computer, the more likely he is to be overweight. Regular physical activity not only helps prevent childhood obesity; it also helps create healthy habits that your kids will stick to in later years. Thirty minutes a day is best. If your child isn't on a team, encourage family walks after dinner, jumping rope, roller-skating or bicycling.

Go green. Vegetables can help keep the heart healthy. That's because dark green vegetables -- such as spinach, broccoli and lettuce -- contain a substance called lutein. High lutein levels in the blood may help reduce cholesterol buildup.

Pass up the fats. Serve lower-fat versions of family favorites, and encourage your kids to substitute baked and whole-wheat snacks for high-fat chips. Switch to fat-free or 1 percent milk and low-fat cheeses and ice cream. If you haven't already, Kick the habit. Smoking contributes to heart disease. Test high-risk kids for cholesterol. Kids with high cholesterol levels are more likely to become adults with high cholesterol levels. If your family has members with heart disease or high cholesterol, your child may be at higher risk for heart disease and should be tested.