

8 tips for families to get healthy this new year

Encouraging children to help plan meals is a positive start, says top dietitian

NEW YEAR'S resolutions often focus on personal improvement. This year, experts are encouraging entire families to consider making a pledge to adopt a healthier and more active lifestyle.

Parents have more potential than anybody else to influence their children's behaviour - including their eating habits - according to a study by the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics in the United States. In fact, parents outrank sports celebrities as the people most children would most like to be, according to the survey. "You are the most influential role model in your child's life," says Kim Larson, registered dietitian nutritionist and Academy spokesperson. "Modelling healthy eating behaviours encourages children to adopt and choose healthy behaviours that will benefit them for a lifetime." **Setting Realistic Goals** Small steps add up, and Larson recommends making healthy lifestyle changes that are realistic and easy to stick with for the long-haul. Try adopting healthy changes for the entire family such as: 1. Make sure your kids know they are part of the team and that health and fitness are a family affair. 2. Encourage children to help plan meals - from developing the menu to shopping to preparing and serving the meal. 3. Serve regular, balanced meals and snacks with a variety of nutrient-rich foods. 4. Eat breakfast daily. 5. Enjoy family dinner together each night or as often as possible. 6. At each meal, fill half your plate with fruits and vegetables. 7. Make at least half of the grains you eat whole grains. 8. Get active. Incorporate physical activity where you can in your day, whether taking a family walk after dinner or hitting the gym. Remember, children and teens should get at least 60 minutes of physical activity per day, and adults should get two-and-a-half hours per week. Focus on overall health, not weight alone. According to the experts, good nutrition, health and fitness should be the focus of your family's goals, not calorie counting, food restriction or working out. "You don't want your kids to think that a healthy lifestyle is only about how much they weigh," Larson says. "Concentrate on delicious nutrition and fun physical activities." For a personalised plan tailored to your lifestyle - food preferences and the unique needs of your family - consider consulting a registered dietitian nutritionist. This New Year, you can get the whole family together by committing to a healthier lifestyle as a team. Source: Jamaica Gleaner