

All about this booklet

Living and raising children in Ireland in the 21st century presents many challenges. As part of the 'Way2Go, for a healthier you' programme, this booklet discusses some of the main issues facing you as parents nowadays.

Inside this booklet you will not only find some useful strategies to meeting these everyday challenges but also tips on how to more effectively communicate as a family, how to eat well in an interesting and fun way and how to become more physically active in our time-poor, money-rich society.

Dr Mark Harrold, Clinical Psychologist addresses some parenting tips, Paula Mee, Nutritionist tackles our eating habits and Dr Catherine Woods, Lecturer in Exercise and Health Psychology, offers advice about physical activity.



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Raising children in an affluent society



Tips on parenting from Dr Mark Harrold

Raising children in Ireland in the 21st century presents unique and unprecedented challenges for parents. Among them are:

- We live in a money-rich and time-poor society.
- It is more difficult for parents to seek advice from their own parents because today's domestic environment differs so greatly from that of only a generation ago.
- Marketing techniques have become more aggressive, making it increasingly difficult for parents to influence their children's choices.
- The technological explosion has created a much more sedentary lifestyle.
- With more material wealth in Irish households today, there is a greater risk of spoiling children.
- The teenage years are particularly challenging for parents and teens, given the powerful influence of marketing interests.

So what can you do? Outlined opposite are some universal parenting principles, which should help navigate the conflicting and challenging course confronting parents today.



The strategies:

Less is more. Rather than yielding to increasing demands, as parents you should encourage your children to think for themselves and avoid being slaves to cynical marketing. Encourage young people to EARN their privileges.

Communicate. The best form of communication is to listen. Busy lives and hectic schedules can prevent you and your children getting together for meaningful exchanges. It is critical for you to make the time to listen and to talk to your children.

Plan ahead. The best way to deal with a problem is to prevent it from happening in the first place. By planning ahead around issues such as curfews, family outings, allowances and access to the computer, potential flashpoints can be avoided.

Praise. This is the most powerful parenting strategy of all. It may seem obvious, but numerous studies indicate that parents have a tendency to criticise their children a lot more than they praise them. Remember, a person is much more likely to repeat a behaviour for which they have received praise, regardless of what age they are! You must practice praising all members of the family until it becomes a habit.

Consistency. In every household, one spouse tends to be a "softie" while the other applies the rules more rigorously. A consistent approach by parents enhances a child's confidence and avoids unnecessary conflict. Consistency between parents is particularly important in circumstances where parents are either divorced or separated.



Incentive schemes. An incentive scheme is a useful way of motivating young people. Some parents are uneasy about this approach. However, teaching young people that they must earn rewards by putting the effort in first, is a responsible approach.

Turn adversity into a learning experience. When conflict arises between parents and children, parents often feel as if they are failing in their duties. Why not view adversity as a time to learn? You should view challenges to parental authority as a testing of limits rather than a young person being oppositional just to upset you. This applies particularly to the teenage years.

Sport and recreation. The benefits of participation in sport and recreation cannot be over-emphasised. Along with the more obvious physical and social benefits, there are significant psychological benefits to getting young people to play. Children who participate in activities will be happier, more confident, less stressed and better able to concentrate.

Mind yourself.

If you wish to do the best for your children, then you must learn to create some time and space for yourself. This should be incorporated into any planning strategy adopted in the home. Remember, there is no such thing as a perfect parent. *All the more reason to look after yourself!*





Eating well

Advice on nutrition from Paula Mee

If you aim at nothing, you'll hit it every time! So if your aim is to eat well as a family, here are a few simple strategies that can help you keep on track and hit your nutritional targets.

Take a weekly approach

Lighten the family's meals for a couple of days with fresh soup or salad for dinner, this helps to balance heavier eating over the weekend.

Eat together, eat better

There's a clear relationship between how often families sit down to eat together and their emotional health and nutritional intake. It's partly the comfort of ritual, but a shared meal may also be one of the few times we can find out what's going on in each other's lives. It's also a time we can explore and learn about new foods and their nutrition.



Plan ahead to avoid mealtime stress

Look into your fridge and plan ahead! What's on for the next few nights? Who will be eating at home, or elsewhere? Will we be eating early or late, and which nights need to be super-fast?

Figure out what you need to build on, what foods or leftovers are in your fridge. Start by choosing the protein source (fish, lean beef, pork, chicken, beans, eggs, etc). Decide on the type of meal you will have (salad/soup/pasta/stir fry/casserole). Plan to serve one vegetable the family enjoys and where possible serve another portion of a less frequently eaten or new vegetable. Instead of very processed carbohydrates such as white rice and chips, introduce less refined carbohydrates such as brown rice or boiled new potatoes.

Involve older children and spark ideas:

What would they like to help prepare this week?



They learn by watching you...

Children learn by watching others. If you don't eat green veg, they probably won't either. If you eat your cereal topped with two tablespoons of sugar, chances are they will do the same. Tap into their desire to imitate – be a good role model yourself. Let them see you enjoying good food and lead by example.

Focus on good behaviour, not bad. Praise your child when they try a new food for the first time. Children repeat behaviour that gets your undivided attention.



There's little value in labelling foods as "bad". However it's a very good idea to set limits on fast foods, soft drinks and other less nutritious foods, and explain to younger children why it's important to do so.

Intuitively, younger children know when they have had enough. Help them to listen to their internal cues. Respect them too and avoid the "clean your plate" scenario.

Presentation is important. Children eat with their eyes first.

And possibly, the most important nutritional strategy...

is that each family member should eat five servings of fruit and vegetables every day! A small glass of juice or a smoothie counts as only one of these servings. We still need another four.

The American Academy of Paediatrics has recently highlighted that drinking too much juice can contribute to obesity, the development of tooth decay, diarrhoea, and other gastrointestinal problems, such as excessive gas, bloating and abdominal pain. Children aged 1 to 6 should only have 4-6 ounces (123-184ml) of juice a day. Older children should be limited to 8-12 ounces (246-369ml) a day. Instead of juice, children and adults should be encouraged to eat whole fruits or raw vegetables as snacks.

Simple steps to eating and drinking a little less:



Choose "slim" glasses

Studies show that we unknowingly pour over 30% more into a short wide glass than a tall narrow glass.



Have your fruit bowl on your countertop instead of the biscuits

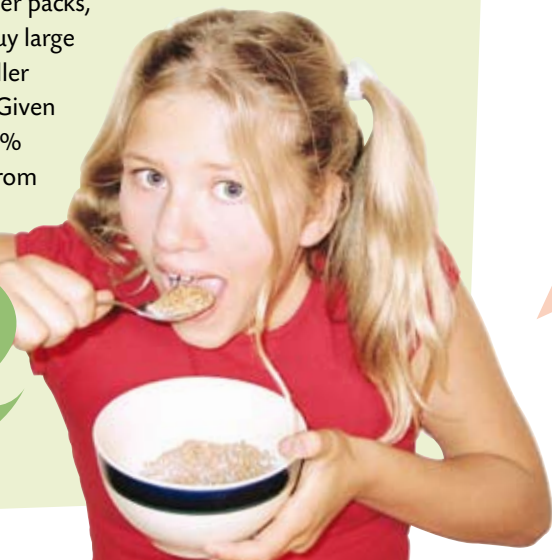
Behavioural studies show that we can eat twice as many chocolate biscuits (7 vs 3) when they are accessible as opposed to when they are stored out of sight.



Choose smaller packs or containers

We serve ourselves more from larger packs, be it cereals or crisps. When you buy large economy packs, dispense into smaller containers or packs for home use. Given a large bucket, we can eat up to 50% more popcorn than when we eat from a medium bucket!

control my portion size by using smaller plates or dessert bowls!



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Food bills

It doesn't have to cost more to eat well. You just need to explore a little and know where and when to buy what. Check out your local area for cheaper shops and markets. It's helpful to stick to a shopping list to avoid ending up with lots of bitty snack foods but no fresh ingredients for main meals. Try to buy more fresh produce, such as meat, fish, dairy produce and vegetables more frequently and in smaller quantities, so you don't end up throwing away unused fresh foods. Remember you can often make tasty soups out of vegetables which are near the end of their shelf life.

Learn which fruits, vegetables and foods are in season, they will be cheaper when there is a good supply. Take advantage of genuine special offers on fresh foods. You may be able to freeze what you can't use immediately. Beware of tempting 'two for the price of one' offers on less nutritious snack foods you really don't need. Look out for supermarket 'own brands' or 'value' products, which can often be as good as the bigger brands.

Finally

The most difficult thing about attaining perfection is finding something to do for an encore! Remember it's what you do most of the time that's important. If you try to get it right *most* of the time - you are certainly doing the best you can to help your children to eat well and live well.



Physical activity and health

Get active with advice and tips from Dr Catherine Woods

What is physical activity?

Physical activity refers to any muscular movement that results in using energy. The energy used during physical activity is more than that used at rest.

There are five main types of physical activity, these include:

- Occupational activity (activity you do through your work)
 - House and gardening activity
 - Leisure activity (sports and free time)
 - Family activity (looking after a sick relative, actively playing with children)
 - Commuting activity (walking or cycling to/from somewhere eg. school or work)
- Most people perceive the term 'exercise' negatively; likewise the term 'workout' indicates work and drudgery, but the phrase 'physical activity' is more positive.
 - We all need encouragement to get active and to remain active. Help yourself get active and encourage your children to be active by looking at physical activity as something fun. You need to value the 'entire' process of participation in physical activity, as well as the resulting benefits. Doing physical activities together as a family is a good way to stay active.

Whatever your age, ability or condition, you can benefit from being more physically active.



What are the benefits of regular physical activity?

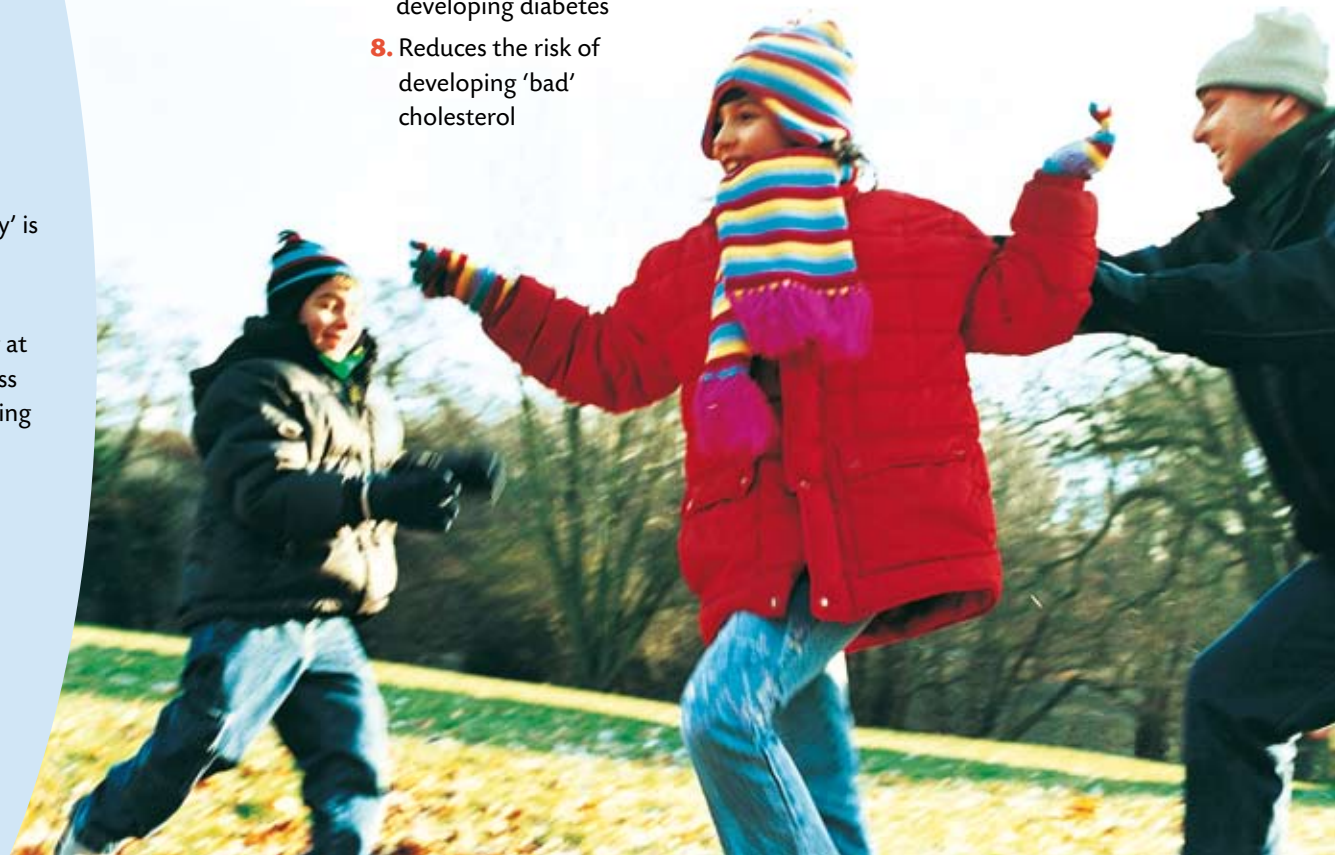
Regular physical activity reduces your risk of heart disease. Inactive people are twice as likely to have heart disease as active people. Being physically active makes you feel better both physically and mentally.

Physical benefits

1. Better health
2. Better posture and balance
3. Weight control
4. Stronger muscles and bones
5. More independent functioning when older
6. Reduces the risk of developing high blood pressure
7. Reduces the risk of developing diabetes
8. Reduces the risk of developing 'bad' cholesterol

Mental benefits

1. Positive mood
2. Reduces stress, depression and anxiety
3. More energy
4. More social opportunities
5. Enhances self-esteem
6. Better sleep and relaxation



What does 'being more physically active' mean?

Being more physically active will mean different things to different people. It all depends on your current lifestyle, for example how active you are at the moment, whether you smoke, what you eat and so on.

How much is enough?

Every adult should aim to do at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity most days of the week. This means that you might need to add minutes of physical activity to your current daily lifestyle.

Begin gradually if you have been inactive for a long time. Aim to add 5-10 minutes of physical activity, 2-3 times a day to your current routine. This will help you to achieve the recommended amount of physical activity, and to gain all the benefits listed in the section 'What are the benefits of regular physical activity?'



How should I feel?

The table opposite is a guide to help you assess the amount of effort you should be expending when you are physically active.

Is the effort I am putting into the activity...?	How warm am I...?	Am I able to...?	Range to stay healthy
Very light effort	Normal temperature	Talk normally	X
Light effort	Starting to feel warm	Whistle/sing	✓
Moderate effort	Warmer	Talk in sentences	✓
Vigorous effort	Quite warm	Talk in short phrases	✓
Maximum effort	Very hot, sweating heavily	Gasp	X

Remember:

- Every little helps, the more the better.
- It's never too late to start, everyone can benefit, even if you have been inactive for a long time.
- Moderate intensity is sufficient to gain health benefits (see the table above).
- Choose whatever activity you enjoy; you don't need to take up a new sport or join an exercise class immediately. You can do that later, if you choose to.





This booklet is a part of the
Way2Go, for a healthier you
programme developed by Pfizer.



The choice is yours...

A parents' guide to getting the balance right