



*Happy
Mother's
Day*



The Family Health Blueprint

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Healthy lifestyle habits need to start young

546 children from landmark local study



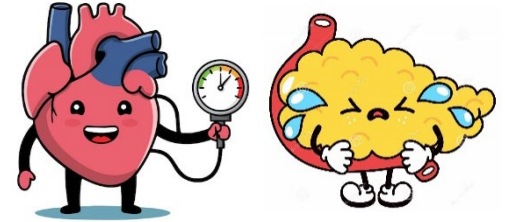
- Assessed child's lifestyle behaviours (incl screentime, physical activity and diet) at 2 and 5 years
- 18% consistently unhealthy behaviours, 71% mixed (healthy & unhealthy)
- Children in unhealthy group
 - poor diet (minimal fruits/veg, more unhealthy snacks + sugary drinks)
 - less active
 - higher screentime
 - “tended to be of Malay ethnicity”



Chia A *et al.* Trajectories of lifestyle patterns from 2 to 8 years of age and cardiometabolic risk in children: the GUSTO study. International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity. 2024 Jan 26;21(1):9.

What was the downstream effect?

- At 8 years, children in the unhealthy group had:
 - nearly 3X risk of pre-hypertension
 - higher levels of diastolic blood pressure
 - increased level of fats in their blood, poorer blood sugar control & worse cardiometabolic risk scoredespite having similar BMI as the rest of the children
- In contrast, children in the healthy group were found to continue exhibiting healthy behaviours even as they grew older.



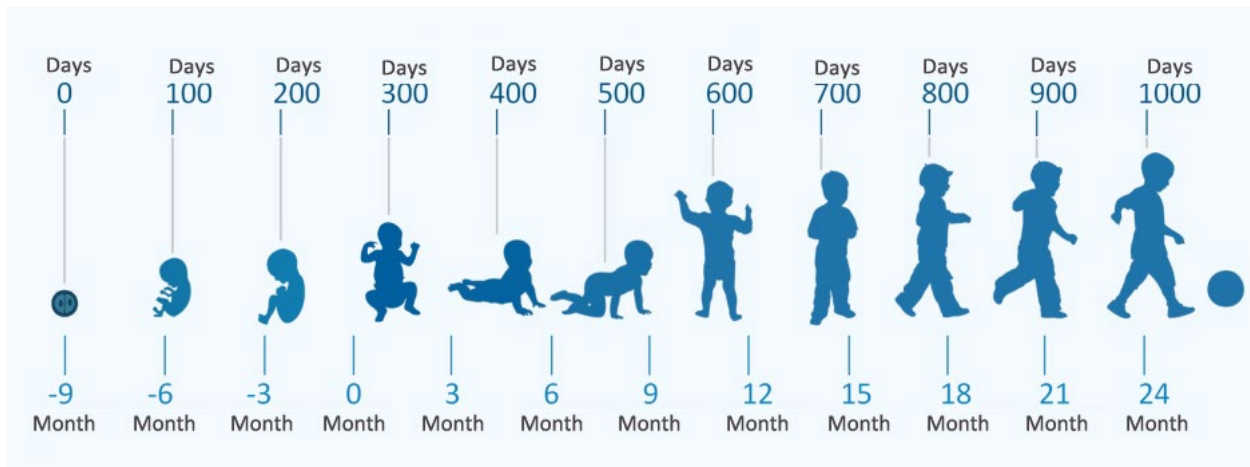
Was there any relation to mother's habits?



Mothers of children in unhealthy group

- breastfed for shorter periods
- had poorer behaviours during pregnancy
 - unhealthy diet
 - physically inactive
 - poorer sleep quality
 - higher TV viewing time
 - higher smoking exposure

The first 1000 days of life...



The time of your pregnancy and the first two years of your child's life will determine the health of your child, the ability to learn in school and to perform a future job.

SUPPORTING FAMILIES IN BUILDING HEALTHY HABITS IN CHILDREN

Grow Well
SG

A national health promotion strategy to enhance preventive care and inculcate healthier lifestyles in children and adolescents.



Strategy to reduce the risk of poor health and development arising from:

- Sedentary lifestyles with excessive screen time
- Insufficient physical activity
- Poor nutrition
- Inadequate sleep

Focuses on children up to 12 years old, and to be extended to older age groups.

New national scheme aims to build healthy habits in children

Grow Well SG seeks to empower families to ensure kids eat, sleep, learn, exercise well

by Lee Fao
Senior Health Correspondent

All children from Primary 1 to 1 will get a personalised health plan from 2024, as part of a new strategy to help them make healthy choices a way of life, and stay off illnesses as they get older.

While most children in Singapore are in good health, many have already picked up poor habits, including too much screen time and junk food, and too little exercise and sleep, as large-scale studies have borne out. This could have dire consequences later on. At-risk children are also more likely to have mental health issues, especially among young people.

So, the Health, Education and Social and Family Development ministries have come together to sign the health plan.

Grow Well SG, launched on Jan 23, aims to empower families to make sure children put down their mobile devices, eat well-balanced meals, get moving and have their health checked, with support from pre-school, schools, healthcare institutions and the community.

In addition, there will be a focus on relationship within the family

and social connections with friends, a key component of healthy lifestyles.

The goals are to eat well, sleep well, learn well and exercise well. At a Jan 23 press conference, Health Minister Ong Ye Koon said there is strong evidence that the first 1,000 days of life are a crucial time when children develop good habits, which have a profound impact on their health as they grow up.

The authorities have also collected enough evidence from studies showing that lifestyle habits from a young age affect the well-being of children as they grow up, he said.

These habits affect brain activity, cognitive development and executive function, which has to do with how children learn and take information, process it and so on, he added.

Prime Minister, Singapore's health initiatives - the Healthier SG preventive care strategy and Age Well SG, which supports seniors in ageing well in their homes and communities.

Grow Well SG will start with children up to 12 years old, but will be extended to older age groups, and



Tanek Primary School pupil Lucas Wong, seven, at a lifestyle prescription session on Jan 23. Under Grow Well SG, healthcare personnel will be able to give children a "lifestyle prescription". ST PHOTO: NG JON LIAN

KEEPING CHILDREN HEALTHY IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Eat Well

WHAT'S HAPPENING: Nearly 44 per cent of five-year-old children in the Dunts (Growing Up in Singapore Towards Healthy Outcomes) cohort study were found in 2022 to have unhealthy eating habits. They consumed more fries, processed meat, biscuits and ice cream - items with high content of saturated fat and refined carbohydrates - than children who ate healthily.

WHY IT MATTERS: Shaping the food preferences of children now will help them maintain healthy diets as they grow older. Poor nutrition can lead to health issues, such as raised blood glucose and diabetes later on in life, for instance.

GOAL: Keep eating fruits and vegetables every day, and do not forget to drink plain water.

Sleep Well

WHAT'S HAPPENING: Only 52 per cent of school-age children in Singapore do not meet the recommended nine to 11 hours of sleep on school days, according to a 2022 report.

WHY IT MATTERS: Insufficient sleep in school-age children has been associated with poorer academic performance, sleepiness during the day, depressive symptoms and poor mental competence, the study said. The risk of mental health conditions, childhood obesity and related chronic health conditions goes up

if poor sleeping habits persist into adulthood.
GOAL: Sleep at least nine hours nightly.

Learn Well

WHAT'S HAPPENING: Most children do not meet recommended screen-time guidelines - only 41 per cent of eight-year-old children meet the recommendation of less than two hours of recreational screen time a day.

WHY IT MATTERS: Inappropriate and excessive screen use displaces other activities, such as sleep, physical activity, interactions with friends and family, and is associated with increased obesity and poorer mental health and well-being.

GOAL: Limit recreational screen use to less than two hours a day. If you are seven to 12 years old.

Exercise Well

WHAT'S HAPPENING: Only 52 per cent of eight-year-old children were involved in organised sports activity during the week. Since 2021, the proportion of school-going children under 18 years old who are involved has risen from 11 per cent to 13 per cent.

WHY IT MATTERS: Insufficient physical activity can lead to children becoming overweight or obese, and other health issues.

GOAL: Be active and exercise for at least an hour every day.

will build on the ministries' various efforts, including the Child and Adolescent Health and Well-being action plan in 2024.

For the children's health plan, parents will have to complete a questionnaire on their child's current habits at the start of the school year. Healthcare personnel will then be able to give the child a "lifestyle prescription" during the Health Promotion Board's (HPB) annual school health screening programme.

This, together with school health screening results, vaccination records and referrals to public healthcare institutions if needed, will be in the child's health plan. It can be viewed on the national platform for digital health, HealthHub. "By doing a health plan, the conversation on maintaining a healthy lifestyle will start," Mr Ong said. Parents gathered at Tanek Primary School, one of the 12 schools involved in a Grow Well SG pilot in 2024.

If a child watches a lot of TV and uses devices a lot, his health plan will say that he has to cut down on screen time, as the guidelines are for up to two hours of screen time outside of school, Mr Ong said.

The child can then discuss the plan with his parents, he added. Mr Lim Lee, whose child, Emily Wong, participated in the pilot in 2024, said the plan is an opportunity for her to discuss health habits with her daughter, a Primary 2 pupil at Tanek Primary School.

For younger children, the Ministry of Health (MOH) will introduce a childhood health behaviour checklist later in 2025. This will be used during the seven annual health checks for children under six years of life - which look at oral health, growth, and mental health skills - to help identify children at risk of developmental delays who may require early intervention. MOH will release more details in the next few months.

A central part of the multi-ministry strategy is getting children to use their screens more purposefully, and to limit screen time. For this, MOH has updated its screen time guidelines.

Assistant Professor Evelyn Lim, who gave input for the updates made to the advisory, said one of the key additions is for parents to not give their children unrestricted access to mobile devices.

This will help prevent a game addiction problem, which can be more of a concern than in most other countries.

CONTINUED ON PAGE A2

1. Consistent bedtime & wind-down routine
2. Enough sleep:
 - 2-6y: 11-12h
 - Primary sch: 10-11h



1. Healthy plate
2. Mindful eating
3. Drink:
 - water by default
 - low fat milk
 - Nutri Grade A or B



Rest Well



Exercise Well

Let's Grow Well Together!



Eat Well

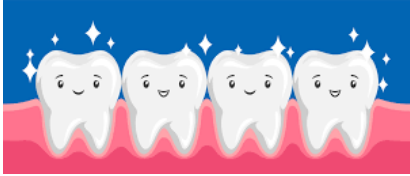


Learn Well

1. 0-2y: Avoid strapping in baby chairs/prams for > 1h
2. 2-6y: At least 60mins daily active time

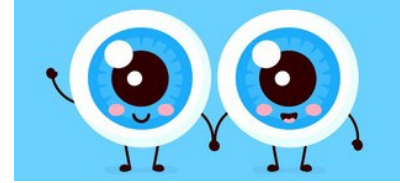
1. 0-2y: Avoid screentime
2. 2-6y: Not > 1h per day
3. Primary Sch: Not > 2h per day (unless for schoolwork)
4. No screens at mealtimes & before bedtime
5. Educational, age-appropriate content (watch together as much as possible)

Other Healthy Habits



Healthy Teeth

- Start brushing teeth once they emerge (usually ~ 6 mths)
- Use toothpaste containing 1000ppm fluoride
- Do not sleep with milk bottle!
- Start bringing to a dentist at 1-year-old



Healthy Eyesight

- Don't let hair or fringe cover the eyes
- Hold book 30cm away, watch TV from 3m away
- Sit upright, ensure good lighting
- Relax eyes after 30-40min of near work

Parents as role models

- Have family meals together
- Stay present when engaging with our children
- Limit our own screentime when in the presence of our children
- Make physical activity a family routine e.g. cycling as a family

