

This is the third in a series of "Healthy Dozen Tips" that Dr. Carmona will release as part of "The Year of the Healthy Child" agenda. The previous tips are all available at www.surgeongeneral.gov.

"On this Father's Day we want to thank all fathers, especially those celebrating their first Father's Day, who work so hard to provide love and support for their children. I know from experience the difficult challenges fatherhood brings. But I also know the great joy and pride that comes from being a dad. We at the Office of the Surgeon General want to take this opportunity to thank fathers and fathers-to-be for caring enough to practice these 'Healthy Dozen' tips that can help ensure a safe and healthy life for their growing children," Dr. Carmona said.

"I've declared this 'The Year of the Healthy Child' for the Office of the Surgeon General," Carmona said. "Each phase of a child's life has its own series of potential hazards, and we're shining a light on preventing those illnesses, injuries, and deaths that are preventable. By appreciating what parents do every day and getting the best information out to parents and children, I hope that every child will grow up healthy, happy, and able to reach their own potential."

"This Father's Day we are concentrating on middle childhood - ages 5 to 9 years. Fathers are important role models to their sons and daughters throughout their lives. This is especially true during the childhood years. It is during this stage that many life lessons are learned, including how to maintain a healthy and safe lifestyle. We must teach our children about the dangers of drugs and the importance of exercise, and we as fathers set the example by making those healthy choices ourselves. There's no better way to teach your son or daughter how to grow up to be healthy adult than by being one yourself," Dr. Carmona said. "Dads, because you teach the lessons that your children will carry for the rest of their lives, you can be their best guide on the path to healthy living."

1. Teach healthy habits for life. Encourage at least 60 minutes of physical activity every day, like taking a walk around the block or playing organized or pick-up sports with other dads and their children. Limit television, video, and computer time. Teach your child to wash his or her hands after using the toilet, after blowing his or her nose, and before meals. Talk with your child about avoiding alcohol, tobacco, drugs, and inhalants. Be a good role model for all these healthy habits. That includes not smoking and not allowing anyone else to smoke around your child. If you need help to quit smoking, please call 1-800-QUIT-NOW (1-800-784-8669) or visit www.Smokefree.gov today.

2. Always use a car safety seat. Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death among children ages 5 to 9. Be sure your child rides in an age-, weight- and height-appropriate child safety seat or booster seat, correctly installed in the back seat, on every trip. Children should ride in a safety seat with a harness as long as possible and then ride in a belt-positioning booster seat until at least age 8. You can tell when your child is ready for a booster seat when your child reaches the top weight or height allowed for the safety seat, your child's shoulders are above the harness slots, or your child's ears have reached the top of the safety seat. If you have any questions about how to install your child safety seat or booster seat, many local fire and police departments will help you. Once your child has outgrown the safety seat, be sure that he or she always wears a seatbelt in your car and any other vehicle. [More information.](#)

3. Practice prevention and safety. Teach your child about staying safe, including always swimming with adult supervision. Use safety equipment that can reduce injuries and even save your child's life. Encourage your child to wear a helmet and protective gear when bicycling, playing contact sports, using in-line skates, or riding a skateboard. In addition, pedestrian safety skills are very important. Children ages 5 to 9 still need supervision when crossing busy streets. Also, teach your child about sun safety, including wearing a hat outdoors and frequently applying SPF 30 sunscreen. If you have a firearm, keep it unloaded and locked up, or remove it from your home. Store ammunition separately from any firearm. Also, a child may come into potentially dangerous situations or may become separated from a parent or caregiver. Be sure your child knows his or her name, parents' names, and phone number. Help him or her to recognize police and fire officials as trusted individuals, while raising caution to other strangers. Get your child's fingerprints taken and keep a recent photograph in your wallet. [More information.](#)

4. Teach and practice healthy eating. A healthy diet maximizes the likelihood of a child growing up healthy and strong. Provide three nutritious meals a day, with fruits and vegetables, supplemented with two healthy snacks a day. Share meals as a family. Offer children nutritious foods and let them decide how much to eat. Avoid foods and drinks that are high in sugar or caffeine. Be a good role model and follow the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. [More information.](#)

5. Encourage good oral health. Cavities are the second-most common chronic disease among U.S. children. Supervise your child's toothbrushing twice a day with a soft toothbrush. As he or she gets older, teach your child to floss and brush his or her teeth unsupervised. Talk with your dentist about fluoride and dental sealants. Make sure your child has dental appointments on a regular basis, and learn dental emergency care. [More information.](#)

6. Practice positive parenting. Show affection for your child. Recognize his or her accomplishments. Encourage your child to express his or her feelings. Read interactively with your child. As your child learns to read, listen as he or she reads out loud to you. Teach family rules. Set limits, establish consequences, and assign responsibilities. Help your child set achievable goals - your child will learn the important skill of taking pride in himself or herself and rely less on approval or reward from others. Talk with your child about school, friends, and things she or he looks forward to in the future. Talk with your child about respecting others and encourage him or her to help people in need. Expect curiosity and be prepared to answer your child's questions about his or her body. Explain that certain body parts are private. Do fun things together as a family, such as playing games, reading, and going to events in your community. [More information.](#)

7. Maximize school success. Meet with teachers and prepare your child to enter school positively - for the first year of school and every year thereafter. Talk about new opportunities, friends, and activities at school. Tour the school with your child, and be involved in school activities. If your child has trouble concentrating or is hyperactive more frequently than other children in his or her same stage of development, talk to your health care professional. Your child could have Attention-Deficit / Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). ADHD is one of the most common childhood behavioral disorders and can persist into adulthood. Symptoms begin before age 7 and can cause serious difficulties in home, school, or work life. The good news is that ADHD can be managed through behavioral or medical interventions, or a combination of the two. [More information.](#)

8. Fully immunize your child. Make sure your child gets all immunizations on time. Immunizations have prevented death and disease for millions of children throughout the United States and the rest of the world. Talk with your child's primary health provider about keeping up to date on all immunizations. [More information.](#)

9. Prevent violence. Prevent bullying by teaching peaceful resolutions to conflict and building positive relationships. Encourage respect for others and our differences. Limit your child's exposure to violence in the media, the community, and at home. Children are watching all the time - and kids who grow up in a family environment filled with violence may learn to view violence as normal, acceptable behavior. Teach your children that there is no place for verbal or physical violence by setting an example with your words and actions. [Stop Bullying Now](#) website.

10. Pay attention to important milestones. For example, children ages 6 to 8 years should be able to dress themselves, catch a ball more easily with only their hands, and tie their shoes. They will also show more independence from parents and family, a stronger sense of right and wrong, a growing desire to be liked and accepted by friends, and a greater ability to describe experiences and talk about thoughts and feelings. If you have concerns, talk with your child's school or a health care professional to decide if developmental screening is warranted. [More information.](#)

11. Learn child first aid and CPR. Know how to call for help, including poison control. The national toll-free line for poison control is 1-800-222-1222. We hope you will never have to use these skills. But if you do, the life you save could be your child's. In addition, make sure your child knows basic first aid and other age-appropriate ways to help in an emergency, including dialing 911. [More information.](#)

12. Make sure your child has a primary health provider. Prevention is the key to a healthy childhood. So make sure that your child has a primary health provider, such as a pediatrician or family practitioner, who knows your child before your child has an illness, injury, or developmental delay that requires medical attention. [More information.](#)

For more information on "The Year of the Healthy Child" visit www.surgeongeneral.gov
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