

PHYSICAL HEALTH & WELL-BEING

- general health ○
- eating breakfast ○
- meals with adults at home ○
- frequency of good sleep ○
- body image ○

The MDI asks children about six key areas that research shows are good indicators of children’s overall health: frequency of breakfast, frequency of good sleep, frequency of junk food consumption, frequency of family meals, body image, and children’s perceptions about their overall general health. Children in the middle years who feel healthy are more likely to be engaged in school, have a feeling of connectedness with their teachers, perform better academically, and are less likely to be bullied or bully others.

research

- Students who eat breakfast more frequently do better in school, and breakfast is especially important for children who are undernourished (Adolphus et al., 2013). Children who eat breakfast are also more likely to have a healthier diet in general (Deshmukh-Taskar et al., 2010).
- Children ages 5 to 13 need 9-11 hours of uninterrupted sleep a night (Hirshkowitz et al., 2015). Children who do not get enough sleep are more likely to have troubles at school, be involved in family disagreements, and display symptoms of depression (Smaldone, Honig, & Byrne, 2007).
- Because of changes in the brain that take place around the time of puberty, children are more strongly attracted to junk foods that contain high amounts of fat and sugar than adults. Overconsumption of junk food affects cognitive function, memory and puts children at increased risk of developing psychiatric disorders later on, whether they show weight gain or not (Reichelt, 2016).
- Frequently eating meals together as a family is related to increased self-esteem and school success and decreased chances of developing eating disorders, substance abuse, violent behaviour and symptoms of depression (Harrison et al., 2015).
- Middle childhood is an important time in which children form lasting viewpoints about their bodies as they become increasingly self-aware and self-conscious, comparing themselves to others. Having a healthy body image is strongly linked to healthy self-esteem in both boys and girls (van den Berg et al., 2010). Being satisfied with one’s body during middle childhood can also prevent eating disorders (Flament et al., 2012).



PHYSICAL HEALTH & WELL-BEING

A complete list of action ideas resources can be downloaded at discovermdi.ca/resources

at home

- Talk to kids about their health and well-being. Let them know that their health and well-being includes not just how they are feeling physically, but also how they're feeling emotionally and socially. Check in frequently to find out how your child feels about his or her health.
- Model a healthy body image for your child. Children often adopt similar attitudes towards their own bodies as those demonstrated by their parents, and are likely to engage in body-changing behaviours if they see their parents doing so (Gattario et al., 2014).
- Create a set bedtime routine with a regular bed and wake time. Do quiet activities to prepare the body for sleep like having a bath, gentle stretching, or listening to relaxing music, guided visualization or an audio book. Avoid screen time and homework 2 hours before bed. Remove screens and media devices from bedrooms.

in school

- Encourage children to keep a daily health journal in which they reflect on how they are feeling physically, emotionally and socially. Brainstorm ideas as a class of ways to stay healthy in each of these areas.
- Help students have a great night's sleep by limiting the amount of time they spend sitting in the classroom. Have standing workspaces, offer movement breaks, and include time for vigorous physical activity each day.
- Team up with a community sponsor to host a breakfast club where kids who don't have time for or can't afford breakfast can have a healthy meal before school starts. School breakfast programs have been shown to improve students' academic performance, especially in mathematics and in particular for students who are undernourished (Adolphus et al., 2013).

in the community

- Offer separate programs for boys and girls in which they can discuss body image issues among themselves. Boys and girls tend to experience body image dissatisfaction in different ways and may feel more comfortable speaking about the topic separately.
- Ensure that after-school programs make having a healthy body image a priority, especially programs that may unintentionally promote self-criticism towards one's appearance, such as team sports, swimming, and dance.
- Consider creating, joining, or aligning work with any food security networks in your town or region. These networks can help ensure families have access to affordable food options and increase awareness of barriers to healthy shopping and eating.