Healthy Living from the Start: A Health Curriculum for Grades K–3

*Healthy Living from the Start* is a comprehensive health curriculum that provides the framework for teaching children about health and well-being. Designed to be used throughout the early grades, this book has a flexible format that allows you to customize your health program for use with multiple grades or in a sequential manner from kindergarten through third grade. The course is divided into 36 lessons, one per week for an entire school year. Each lesson includes three activities to choose from for each grade level, giving you a wide range of options for exploring each topic. Activities, which can usually be completed in 15–30 minutes, provide the starting point for conversations about health and fitness.

The course is divided into six units:

I. Physical Body
II. Personal Safety
III. Healthy Habits
IV. Self-esteem
V. Self and Community
VI. Whole Health

This book is written with homeschooling parents in mind, but this curriculum can easily be used by teachers in a group setting.

Disclaimer: None of the information, instruction, or activities in this book are intended to take the place of the advice and care of a qualified health care professional. If you have any questions about your health or your child’s, please consult your health care provider.
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Lesson 3

Hygiene

Every child needs to learn how to properly care for his or her body. No doubt, your child has been learning by example since birth, but now you can begin to address specific topics in a more direct way.

Kindergarten

Keeping clean

- **Show me how**
  
  Let your child show you how to wash hands, hair, and body, how to comb or brush hair (getting tangles out of long hair), and how to trim nails. Whatever he or she can't do yet, do for your child, showing tips to make it easier. Whatever he or she isn't quite doing correctly, gently show the correct way to make it easier. Another fun activity is having your child teach you how to do these things—washing hands, for instance. It can be fun to do exactly as your child says, taking all instructions literally. This may require patience from both parties! Even the simple act of washing hands takes more steps than you may think.

- **The skin you’re in**
  
  Fill a Ziploc plastic bag halfway with red-colored water or juice (cranberry juice works great). Pretend the bag is your body and the red liquid is the blood inside. If you’d like, you can add things to the inside of the “body”—edible things like fruit if you are using juice, or sticks, marbles, etc., if you are using colored water. These are the bones, muscles, and organs in the body. Explain that the bag is like your skin, which is like a big sealed envelope that keeps everything inside. Next, get a pin and a bowl, and let your child puncture the bag with
a pin—a cut! Catch the “blood” in the bowl so it doesn’t make a mess, or let it drip into the sink if you don’t want to save it. As soon as the puncture is made, quickly try to seal the hole with a Band-Aid. This may or may not work, but it’s a great way to begin talking about how your skin is self-sealing. A plastic bag will never “heal” from a cut, but your skin will. Discuss ways to take care of the largest organ in the body—your skin.

- Getting dirty, getting clean

Make a mud pit in the yard or dig in the garden until your child’s hands are dirty. Have your child carefully wash hands (including under the nails) until they are completely clean. The dirt helps show whether your child is doing a thorough job with hand washing. Next, repeat this getting dirty/getting clean activity with feet. Depending on the weather, those who are really adventurous can do a full body roll in the mud and then hose off outside before getting in a hot tub and scrubbing head to toe. This simple, silly activity helps children not only practice practical washing skills but also appreciate the feeling of being clean.

1. Grade 1

   Teeth

- Be true to your teeth (or they’ll be false to you)

  Let your child be the teacher and teach you how to brush and floss correctly. Exaggerate incorrect technique in silly ways (humor is always welcome) to focus your child’s attention on the proper way to care for teeth.

- Visiting the dentist

  If you can, visit the dentist’s office to look at models of teeth, posters of dental health, and pamphlets of dental care. Speak to a hygienist, dental assistant, or dentist about any questions or anything you are curious about. You and your child can brainstorm a list of questions ahead of time. Here are a few possibilities:

  - Why does plaque form on teeth?
• Are certain foods, snacks, or drinks particularly bad for teeth?
• Is eating fresh (raw) fruits and veggies good for your teeth?
• Why do baby teeth fall out?

Counting teeth

This can be done with a hand-held mirror or just by feel. Have your child try to count his or her teeth—if that’s too hard, you can do it for your child. Next, count your teeth. Do you both have the same number? Why or why not? Count the number of teeth of other family members and compare. Talk about how (and why) teeth change over time.

If you have a very docile and tolerant pet, count its teeth, too! Animal teeth are often quite different from human teeth in size, shape, and appearance. Look at what’s different. Is anything similar?

Grade 2

Disease prevention

Rules to remember

There are many things we do on a daily basis to stay healthy. Have your child create a list of health rules and illustrate or decorate it. Here are a few to get you started:

• Wash your hands before and after handling food and after using the bathroom. Wash hands when you arrive home after being outside or away from home (errands, visiting, etc.).

• Cough or sneeze into the inside of your elbow (not your hand) or into a tissue or handkerchief. Always turn away from others or from food when you have to cough or sneeze.

• Wipe or blow your nose with a tissue, and then throw it away and wash your hands. Don’t use your shirt or hand to wipe your nose, and don’t drop the tissue on the floor or table.
Lesson 3
(continued)

- Don’t share drinks, food, or utensils when you or someone else is sick.

What other rules can you think of?

**How things spread**

This activity is a bit messy (prepare for that!) but powerfully demonstrates how disease-causing germs can easily spread. Choose a brightly colored piece of chalk and color the palms of your child’s hands. (Glitter is a great alternative to chalk for this activity; sprinkle some on each hand.) Next have your child spend five minutes doing normal activities in the house, such as opening doors and cupboards, picking up a glass or plate, pulling out a chair or touching your arm or hand. (For the sake of easy clean-up, you may want to limit this game to a single room in your home.) At the end of five minutes, have your child wash hands and then together see how many places you can find that are marked with chalk or glitter. Talk about how many illnesses are spread in this manner, and how washing hands can help stop the spread of the tiny germs that cause illness.

**Building immunity**

In order to begin the conversation about building immunity or developing your resistance to illness, ask your child to list all the ways he or she can think of. Don’t worry if nothing comes to mind at first. Begin a list together—this can be a list of words, or can be visual, with drawn illustrations or cut-out pictures. Include the following on your list:

- Eating healthy foods
- Getting plenty of water
- Getting enough sleep
- Being active and outdoors
- Washing hands regularly
- Having regular medical check-ups

Discuss why and how each item on the list helps build a healthy immune system.
Good grooming habits

Use your senses

As adolescence nears, children sometimes don’t realize when body odor begins to occur. Parents can be very aware of smells but may not know how to approach the conversation of body odor. This activity lets your child use sensory observations to guide grooming and hygienic behaviors. Begin by blindfolding your child and asking, “What do you smell?” After identifying household smells, ask your child to sniff his or her forearm and hand, and then describe the smells (if any). Next, sniff hair (have your child smell your hair if his or her hair is too short to smell), and finally have your child sniff his or her underarms. You can also sniff clothing to determine its freshness (including socks). This exercise is meant to bring awareness to body smells. Smells of soap, laundry detergent, shampoo, deodorant, or body lotion might be noticed during this exercise, although your child may not be able to pinpoint the source of the odor. Answering “it smells good” or “it smells stinky” is just fine. Conversations around the role of regular bathing and deodorant can follow, if necessary.

Long hair everywhere

For children with long hair, keeping it neat and tangle-free can be a challenge. Spend some time experimenting with hairstyles—photos can inspire you or use your imagination. Children can learn to braid their own hair in different ways (one braid or two braids), and you can get more elaborate with French braids, Princess Leia braids, or a coronet-style hairstyle. Children can experiment with hair ties to keep their hair tidy. Experiment with hair gel for crazy hair style fun. Also, developing a nightly habit of brushing hair together can be very relaxing and make morning hair tidying quicker and easier.

Grooming checklist

Brainstorm with your child a list of daily grooming habits and then create a chart together to post in a prominent place. It might include the following:

- brush teeth
- comb hair
Lesson 3
(continued)

• clean and trim nails
• clean wax out of ears
• wash hands and face
• wear clean clothes
• check appearance in the mirror before leaving the house

Add anything else you can think of that will help your child develop healthy grooming habits.

NOTES
Lesson 16
Exercise and Sleep

Exercise and sleep are just as important to the body as healthy food. Choose one (or more) of the following explorations around exercise and sleep.

Kindergarten
Sleeping and waking

- **Good morning**
  
  How does your child wake up in the mornings? Does he or she come awake easily, ready for action, or wake up slowly and need a gentle morning routine? Many families have a regular bedtime routine but let the morning start with a less-than-organized jump into the day. Talk to your child about your morning routine and see if you can find ways to get your day off to a good start. For instance, a five minute morning stretching session or a ten-minute walk before breakfast can help set a relaxed, cooperative tone for the day. Come up with a few ideas for a morning routine, and try a new one each morning for a week. Discuss which ones worked well, and which ones didn’t, and why.

- **Good night**
  
  Ask your child, “What helps you fall asleep?” Tell your child what you do to fall asleep. Then have your child ask several other people, “What do you do to fall asleep?” Responses might include things like reading in bed, a foot massage, reviewing the good things that happened that day, a nighttime stretch and deep breathing, or curling up with a beloved cat or a favorite blanket or pillow.
Lesson 16
(continued)

Find out if any of the responses sounds like something your child might like to try. Try something new each night for a week, and talk about what worked and what didn’t.

- **Wind up and unwind**

  Sometimes sleep cycles change and a child can have trouble falling asleep. Here’s an activity to help the body relax and prepare for sleep. By first flexing and tensing muscles, it becomes easier to relax and, quite literally, unwind. Have your child lie in bed (on top of or under the covers). Ask your child to wind up or tangle together his or her fingers (cross them and twist them together in as many ways as possible). You do it, too. When you both have your fingers all wound up in a knot, hold them tight and count to five together, and then unwind and relax your fingers while taking a deep breath and blowing it out. Next, wind up your arms, curling them around one another, twisting and crossing them in any way you can manage. When your arms (and your child’s) are all tangled up, hold them tight and count to five together. Unwind and release them while letting out a deep breath. Repeat with legs (and toes, if you can—challenging!). Afterwards, lie quietly for a minute, enjoying the satisfying sense of muscle release that comes after holding tension, and then continue with your regular bedtime story or routine.

Grade 1

**Exercise anywhere, anytime**

- **Room for everything**

  Exercise doesn’t need to take up a lot of space, and this activity helps prove it. Begin by using chalk (if you are outside) or tape or some other visual marker to create a box about four feet square. You and your child will take turns demonstrating active exercises that can be done in this space. For instance, you might leap from one side of the space to the other, or roll, cartwheel, or dance. You can do whatever you like, as long as you don’t step outside of the box. After a few turns for each of you, change the size of the box to three feet square, and repeat. Perhaps you can still do some of the same things but have to modify your movements (taking higher leaps rather than
long ones, for example). Try to come up with new ideas or variations. Next, reduce the size of the box to two feet square. What happens now? Can you still do energetic exercise? How about jumping jacks or squats? Finally, shrink the box to one foot square and explore active movement that keeps your feet in one spot (like jumping rope, hula hooping, or marching in place). Have fun with it!

- **We will have weather**

  People exercise in all kinds of weather. Have your child draw pictures of three different outdoor exercises or activities that he or she likes to do when it is sunny. Next, draw pictures of three different outdoor exercises or activities that your child likes to do when it is rainy (you might have to help with some ideas of your own). Finally, draw three different pictures of outdoor exercises that can be enjoyed when it is snowy. Next, look outside to determine the weather, and choose one of the activities to do.

- **Big and small**

  This is a silly game which brings attention to different kinds of movement. Begin by brainstorming a list of five full body activities (like running, climbing, jumping jacks, etc.). These should be activities that can be easily done in your house or yard. Write them down. Next, brainstorm five activities that use mainly the hands (fine motor control), like drawing, knitting, doing a puzzle, etc. Write them down. Now, have your child try to match up pairs of exercises that can be done simultaneously. You might find that all possible combinations are impossible (knitting while doing jumping jacks??) but you will have fun imagining the crazy combinations. Finally, choose one full body (large motor) activity and one fine motor activity to do before the day is over.
Grade 2

Understanding your body’s needs

Body mechanics

In this activity, you and your child will take turns moving one another’s limbs to explore joints, muscles, and range of motion. Ask your child to stand still. Say, “Pretend you are my puppet and your body can only move if I move it.” Begin by lifting your child’s hand and turning it this way and that, and then putting it down. Move the arm to make it bend at the elbow, and then circle the shoulder joint. Your child will probably get the giggles—it feels funny to have someone else control your body!—but you can give a mock-serious reminder that “Puppets don’t laugh!” (This will probably cause more giggles.) Move from arms and shoulders to legs and feet, lifting one at a time while keeping your “puppet” from falling. After you’ve enjoyed this for a while, switch places and you become the puppet while your child experiments with what joints and limbs can and can’t do.

What happened?

There are lots of body changes that occur during exercise, and this activity draws your child’s awareness to these changes. Begin by having your child exercise vigorously for five minutes. When five minutes are up, have your child come to a stop and ask, “What does your body feel like?” If that doesn’t elicit any specific responses, prompt more careful observations with questions like these:

- How fast is your heart beating?
- Is your forehead sweaty?
- Are you breathing harder than normal?
- Do your muscles feel tight or loose?
- Do you feel warm?

Have your child complete another five minutes of exercise and see if he or she comes up with any additional observations. Talk about why these changes occur.
Restful breaks

While children often seem to go-go-go all day, finding ways to take a break from the action during a busy day can be very beneficial. Talk to your child about ways he or she likes to rest and take a break from being active during the day. Reading a book is often a preferred choice. See if you can come up with a list of several ideas. Consider creating a rest spot where your child can go for a peaceful break. Maybe there’s a small nook where you can add pillows and a blanket, and a basket of books or an audio book set-up. Making a fort creates another good place to take a break. You can drape a sheet over the back of a couch or chair to make a quiet tent-like refuge.

Grade 3

Sleep schedule

Track your rhythms

Have your child keep track of the amount of sleep time for one week. Create a chart to write down the time of waking and the time of going to sleep. Add a column for your child to calculate the number of hours spent sleeping per night. Include space for your child to write notes about the level of energy each day or the feeling of being tired. Talk about the sleep schedule and any changes that might need to be made to improve the quality or quantity of sleep.

Dream journal

Writing down dreams or sharing them aloud can be a great experience. If your child doesn’t usually remember dreams, this activity can help. Put a small notebook by the bed and have your child decorate the cover with the title Dream Journal. (This will help remind your child of the intention to remember and record dreams.) As soon as he or she wakes, have your child write down or tell any images or dreams that can be remembered. You can help by asking about the dream recollection as soon as you greet your child in the morning. Continue this for one week and see if your child’s dream recall improves. You can do the activity yourself as well and share your dreams with your child.
Lesson 16

(continued)

**Progressive relaxation**

Taking a few minutes at night to relax the body can promote a more restful sleep and an easier transition from waking to sleep. Here are two ways this can be done (both can be done after your child is in bed under the covers). Explain to your child how the exercise works before you begin. At first it will be helpful for you to lead the exercise by saying each step aloud, but if your child enjoys these exercises, he or she will quickly learn to do them without your help.

- **Body Rest:** Beginning with the toes, you will work your way through each part of the body, telling it to relax. Begin by saying, “Close your eyes and take a deep breath. Now tell your toes to relax. Toes, relax.” Wait a few moments, and then continue: “Now tell your feet to relax. Feet, relax.” Pause again, giving your child time to feel the feet relax. Sometimes it helps to wiggle the body part slightly and then let it relax. Let your child know this is okay (sometimes the strain of trying to hold the body still creates more tension). Continue to slowly and quietly work your way through the body: “Relax, calves. Relax, knees.” Talk your child through relaxing the thighs, hips, stomach, back, shoulders, arms, hands, fingers, neck, face, and, finally, eyes.

- **Tense and Relax:** This exercise is similar to the first one, but your child tenses each body part for a few seconds before relaxing it. Your instructions might sound like this: “Squeeze your toes as tight as you can. Tighter, tighter! Now let them relax completely.” Wait a few moments, and then continue with the next body part, working your way from the feet to the head, until the entire body has been tensed and relaxed.