

The Sallygate Parent Guide Series

Healthy Bodies, Healthy Minds, Healthy Boundaries

Helping children develop healthy habits for life

Introduction

"I just want my child to be healthy."

When most people hear the words *healthy lifestyle*, they immediately think about food and exercise. Of course, these things matter.

But a healthy lifestyle is much bigger than that.

Children thrive when their bodies and minds work together.

Good sleep helps children regulate emotions.

Regular movement supports concentration.

Healthy food fuels learning.

Positive relationships build confidence.

Time outdoors reduces stress.

Feeling safe helps children learn.

At Sallygate, we believe that healthy lifestyles are not about perfection.

They're about creating daily habits that help children feel physically well, emotionally secure and ready to enjoy life.

What Does a Healthy Lifestyle Really Mean?

A healthy lifestyle isn't about strict diets or intensive exercise programmes.

It's about balance.

Children need opportunities to:

- Sleep well.
- Move every day.
- Eat a variety of nutritious foods.
- Spend time outdoors.
- Build positive relationships.
- Enjoy hobbies and interests.
- Rest and recover.
- Feel emotionally safe.

Every child starts from a different place.

The goal is progress, not perfection.

Why Does This Matter So Much for Children with SEND?

Children with SEMH, autism, ADHD and trauma histories often experience challenges that make healthy habits more difficult.

These may include:

- sensory differences affecting food choices
- poor sleep
- anxiety

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- emotional regulation difficulties
- executive functioning challenges
- reduced confidence
- lower participation in physical activity

These aren't reasons to lower expectations.
They're reasons to provide the right support.

Healthy Bodies Support Healthy Minds

The connection between physical and emotional wellbeing is well established.

Research shows that regular movement can:

- improve attention
- reduce anxiety
- support emotional regulation
- improve sleep
- strengthen confidence
- improve mood
- reduce stress

Children don't have to become athletes.

They simply need opportunities to move in ways they enjoy.

Food Is About Fuel, Not Perfection

Many children have complicated relationships with food.

Some may:

- avoid certain textures
- have a limited range of foods
- forget to eat
- seek certain foods when anxious
- struggle to recognise hunger

This is particularly common in autism and ADHD.

Healthy eating isn't about forcing children to eat everything.

It's about gradually helping them explore new foods whilst ensuring they receive the nutrition they need.

Curiosity is far more powerful than pressure.

Sleep Is the Foundation

One poor night's sleep can affect:

- concentration
- behaviour
- emotional regulation
- memory
- physical health

Children who consistently struggle to sleep often need understanding before they need solutions.

Good sleep routines are one of the greatest investments we can make in children's wellbeing.

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Why Movement Looks Different for Every Child

Not every child enjoys football.

Not every child likes running.

Physical activity can include:

- Forest School
- walking
- climbing
- cycling
- dancing
- swimming
- trampolining
- gardening
- yoga
- active play

The best activity is the one your child enjoys enough to keep doing.

Time Outdoors Matters

Nature supports wellbeing in remarkable ways.

Research suggests spending time outdoors can:

- reduce stress
- improve attention
- support emotional regulation
- increase physical activity
- improve mood

That's one of the reasons outdoor learning plays such an important role at Sallygate.

Children don't just learn outdoors.

They often regulate, recover and reconnect there too.

Healthy Minds Need Healthy Relationships

A healthy lifestyle isn't just physical.

Children also need:

- trusted adults
- friendships
- opportunities to belong
- encouragement
- kindness
- laughter
- connection

Relationships are one of the strongest protective factors for children's mental health.

Healthy Boundaries

One of the most valuable things we can teach children is how to recognise healthy boundaries.

This includes:

- saying no

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- asking for help
- understanding consent
- respecting others
- managing screen time
- recognising emotions
- balancing work and rest

Healthy boundaries help children feel safe and confident throughout life.

Autism, ADHD, PDA and Healthy Living

Autism

Healthy habits often develop best through predictable routines, visual supports and gradual change.

Respect sensory differences while gently expanding experiences.

ADHD

Movement is not a distraction from learning.

For many children, movement helps learning happen.

Frequent opportunities for physical activity often improve attention and regulation.

PDA Profiles

Avoid turning healthy habits into constant demands.

Offer choices.

Work collaboratively.

Focus on shared goals rather than control.

Trauma

Children who have experienced trauma often need emotional safety before they can engage with healthy routines.

Predictability, relationships and trust remain central.

Ten Everyday Habits That Make a Difference

- ✓ Sleep at similar times.
- ✓ Drink plenty of water.
- ✓ Move every day.
- ✓ Spend time outside.
- ✓ Eat together where possible.
- ✓ Reduce screen use before bed.
- ✓ Celebrate effort rather than perfection.
- ✓ Laugh together.
- ✓ Talk about emotions.
- ✓ Make time for rest.

Small habits repeated consistently create lasting change.

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Common Myths

Myth

Healthy means eating perfectly.
Exercise has to be organised sport.

Healthy children don't struggle emotionally.

Children should simply know how to make healthy choices.

Reality

Healthy living is about balance, not perfection.
Any enjoyable movement benefits physical and emotional wellbeing.

Physical and emotional wellbeing influence one another.

Healthy habits are taught, modelled and practised over time.

How We Promote Healthy Living at Sallygate

Healthy lifestyles are woven throughout everything we do.

Children experience:

- Healthy Bodies programme
- Outdoor Learning
- Forest School
- Life Skills
- Cooking
- PE
- Emotional regulation
- Relationship-based practice
- Enrichment
- Physical activity throughout the day

We don't teach healthy lifestyles as a single lesson.

We build them into school life.

Because healthy habits become lasting habits when they're lived, not simply taught.

Final Reflection

One of the things I've become increasingly certain about is that healthy living isn't about creating healthier children.

It's about creating happier children.

Children who sleep well.

Children who feel safe.

Children who enjoy moving.

Children who laugh.

Children who have trusted adults around them.

Children who understand their emotions.

When we think about health in that way, we stop chasing perfection and start building habits that genuinely improve quality of life.

That's the approach we take at Sallygate.

Because healthy bodies, healthy minds and healthy boundaries don't happen by accident.

They grow through relationships, understanding and everyday experiences.

This is Sallygate.

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Included Download

My Healthy Lifestyle Passport

Children complete this each week by colouring or ticking:

Sleep

- ☐ I went to bed at a similar time.
- ☐ I woke up feeling rested.

Hydration

- ☐ I drank plenty of water today.

Nutrition

- ☐ I tried something healthy.
- ☐ I ate breakfast.

Movement

- ☐ I moved my body today.
- ☐ I spent time outside.

Wellbeing

- ☐ I talked to someone I trust.
- ☐ I felt proud of something today.
- ☐ I helped someone else.

Reflection

One healthy thing I did this week was:

Something I'd like to improve next week is:

Research and evidence base

This guide should cite recognised guidance and evidence from organisations such as **NICE**, the **NHS**, the **Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health**, **Public Health England/Office for Health Improvement and Disparities**, and current research on physical activity, sleep, nutrition, emotional wellbeing and neurodevelopment.