

HEALTHY HABITS CONTEST GRAND PRIZE WINNERS

Grades 4-8

Elizabeth G.
Columbus, Ohio

Over the past year, I've developed the healthy habit of running. I usually jog three times a week and go anywhere from one to three miles (depending on how I'm feeling while I'm running.) This isn't a whole lot, but it's enough to get my heart rate faster and give my legs a workout. I like to run outside preferably, but my family does own a treadmill for when it's raining or unbearably cold outside. I live by a park, and I like to run around the lake in the park. I like just being able to enjoy nature while I run. When I run indoors, I usually listen to music or watch TV while I run.

I got hooked on running from my parents. They are both runners, and have even run half-marathons. I was really stressed out with school and other things around last spring. My mom suggested I take up running. The first time I went running, I was terrible. I could barely walk/run a mile. Over the next month, I continued to run just small amounts. Those small amounts were enough to make a difference, though. They took away some of the stress and they gave me goals to work towards. Each time I ran, I would try to go just a little bit farther. Before I knew it, I was running two miles. By summer, I could run three and a half miles steadily.

Running gives me time to just be by myself and think. I don't have to worry about anything other than how far I'm going to run. I can just relax and let my feet do the work. Because I run on my own, not as a sport, there is no pressure for me to run a certain distance or at a certain speed. I just run however I feel like running. I can run whenever I feel like I need to run, and I don't have to follow a schedule.

Running doesn't just affect my stress level, though. It keeps me fit and feeling healthy. It also helps me get a good night's sleep. Running tires my body out and prevents me from just laying awake in my bed for ages. Running even affects my eating habits. If I'm planning to run on a Saturday morning, then I'll stay away from the Pop-tarts and eat something healthier. I know what it's like to run with weak legs, and I'd rather eat something that'll stick with me. I may not ever be a marathon runner, or break any world records, but running has taught me how good it can feel to exercise.

Grades 9-12

Emily V.
Auburn, N.Y.

How you take care of your body will directly affect your life span. I have always been taught about being healthy and all of the reasons why I should, but I never really took it to heart until recently. Now I am making changes such as eating healthier and exercising more to make sure that my body is healthier.

As many have noticed, the amount of health-related topics on TV seems to be on the rise. Popular shows such as *Oprah* and *Montel* are frequently doing shows about being overweight and unhealthy people. We also see it on the news and hear about it in school. The reason why I really listened this time was because I realize that I am almost an adult. When I was a child everyone always told me I didn't have to worry about what I ate and that I was plenty active enough simply because I was a child. In my early teen years my relatives would warn me, "You can eat like that now, but just wait 'til you're my age." I am 3 months away from technically becoming an adult. After thinking about that information it became painfully obvious to me that unhealthiness is a pattern that develops over time and that it has already started. I knew that I could not make up for lost time, but I knew I had to at least get myself on the right track.

After hearing so much about how bad saturated fats are, I finally started reading my labels. I also switched to whole wheat pasta and cut down on all the French fries. My favorite change was taking up Pilates. I do Pilates 5 days a week and I love it. I can feel my body becoming healthier every day. Not only that, but the Pilates technique is really fun and can be very relaxing. I've also started trying to walk more. I asked for a pedometer for Christmas so that I can track how well I really am doing.

I haven't made any drastic changes, but I am starting off slowly to make sure that all of my new habits stick. The most important thing is that now I am fully aware of what I am doing to my body. Not only does being healthier make me feel physically good, but emotionally good. I have found that I am in a good mood when I get up in the morning as long as I have been successful in being healthy and exercising the day before. I also feel like I have more energy which is always a good thing. For the New Year I plan to add another healthy habit or two to my daily routine and I promise that I will stick to it.