

Staying active as a family

All of you have diligently reduced or eliminated much of the unhealthy food habits you once had. As with healthy eating, kids do as you do, not as you say. They are more likely to want to be active when other family members are active also. Becoming more active as a family is just as important in your quest to be healthier over a lifetime. It is challenging to find ways to build physical activity into your family routine that already includes working 40 or more hours a week, cooking, cleaning, shopping, music lessons, girl or boy scouts, dance, baseball....All of these activities are important and necessary. So, how to get family members together for physical activities???

- 1) Plan, plan, and more planning. Plan regular physical activities as a family. After-dinner walks, even when it is dark and cold. Bundle up and take a flashlight. You'll all be together so it will be safe, and once you get out and going you'll discover that is a lot of fun to be out when few others are. If it's raining, get wet. Then come home, take a warm bath or shower, and you'll be refreshed for the rest of the evening and sleep like a baby. Set aside one weekend half day to go on a fun, active outing together like bike riding, miniature golf, the batting cages, water slide parks and canoeing/boating in the summer, hikes or ice/roller skating. Don't forget your neighborhood parks for family games of soccer, basketball, softball, Frisbee, tag, or dodge ball.
- 2) Focus on fun rather than skill. Who cares if you know how to play basketball, soccer, or softball, much less throw a Frisbee? Who better to do it with than your children who haven't learned how? If kids think of physical activity as fun, much less a fun time together with their family, they are more likely to want to do it.
- 3) Include activity in your daily routine. Take the stairs, park the car further away at the store, surprise your kid or friend and spontaneously suggest a "race" to the destination. Involve the whole family in chores around the house such as cleaning, gardening, washing the car, walking the dog.
- 4) If your child is uncomfortable in competitive sports, look for activities that are not based on skill level like biking, swimming, ice skating, dancing, flying a kite, tag, walking, hiking, bowling, and sledding. If your child is interested in team sports, encourage them and help them join a local team. Make yourself available to practice the sport if they seek you out, but be careful not to push. The goal is activity that is fun, not overall skill.
- 5) Explore a variety of physical activities and see what you all like best. Some activities you may want to try that I may or may not have mentioned above include:

basketball	bowling	biking
canoeing	catch	dancing
football	freeze tag	frisbee
hiking	hopscotch	ice skating
kickball	playing outside	rollerblading
running	soccer	softball
swimming	tennis	volleyball
martial arts	calisthenics	

6) Don't forget to limit television, video games and computer time to one to two hours a day, and no more than eight hours a week!!!

7) Last, but not least. Don't forget to find opportunities for kids to play together with other children. Obvious, but often forgotten. Kids are inherently active unless they in the habit of sitting around (or out of the habit of being active!)

It is hard work to change habits, especially ones that are long-lived. Over time, months to years, active living will be your family's habit and something you look forward to and miss if it is not in your regular routine. Be patient, but be persistent. It's fun!!