



Heathly Hints from Earth's Best "Healthy Hints for Healthy, Active Families"

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We all have things we do every single day without fail, like brushing our teeth and hair – but did you know that daily physical exercise is just as important to your family's health? Physical activity revs up your engines and keeps everything running smoothly in your body. Besides lowering your risk for diabetes, heart disease and obesity, daily activity promotes good sleep habits, helps us focus properly and increases our brainpower. Now those are some great benefits for you and your family!

Physical activity doesn't have to be a structured workout. It can be a very fun part of your day and a perfect chance to spend time with your children. Here are some easy hints to help you get up and going.

Never too young or too old!

Physical activity is necessary for all of us, no matter our age. Studies show that children as young as 2 years old benefit from "structured play" activities that improve their heart and lung function and their coordination. A strong healthy body will boost the immune system function and the self-esteem of all children. Parents that exercise become great role models for their children, and even toddlers recognize and want to emulate the habits of their parents.

Schedule exercise into every day.

You and your family are more likely to be active if you set aside time for it on a daily basis. So put it on the calendar, in your daytimer and if necessary set an alarm to remind you. You will be so glad you did!

Make fitness fun!

Kids love competition. Turn exercise into a game and they won't want to stop playing. Who can do the most pushups or situps? Who can stand on one leg the longest? Who can make it from point a to point b the fastest, or the most times? If you can't think of a game then just add noise. Sing, shout, count in a foreign language, clap, stomp ... almost all children love to make noise, and toddlers in particular will respond to the opportunity to yell with mommy.

Use props.

Kids also love toys, so incorporate them into your fitness games. The one-legged ball toss is a great one to try out. Just stand on one leg and toss a ball back and

forth between all members of the family. Or try a pushup with a small ball under one hand. Another idea: make an obstacle course out of household items and time each family member as they race through it.

Do it together!

Busy families are always looking for opportunities to spend time together – why not build that time around a little healthy exercise? Physical exertion helps our bodies produce the right amount of serotonin (our happy hormone) and limit the amount of cortisol (stress hormone) found in the body. After a hard day at work or school it can be difficult for families to bond when everyone is over-fatigued or stressed out. Go out and play for 45 minutes and watch the smiles return, giggles begin and the discussions take off!

Monitor your activity levels.

Even kids who play sports might not be getting enough activity. So for one week write down everyone in your families' activity levels and add it up. Most adults and children need four hours per week of physical play, activity or exercise to lower our risk of many diseases. Many experts said that 10,000 steps a day is the number we all need to hit; however pediatric cardiologists tell us that for boys and girls alike that number should be raised to 12,000. If you want to truly gauge your levels, wear an inexpensive pedometer and see what your weekly totals are for every member of the family.

Gradually build into the proper levels of activity.

If you and your family have been relatively inactive for the past few months (or years!) then adding 60 minutes a day really isn't in your best interest. Instead start with 20 minutes a day and each week add five more minutes.

Reward yourself and your family for consistency.

Keep a chart on the refrigerator of your weekly goals for activity and give everyone a gold star when they reach their goals. If everyone in the family reaches their goal for the week then reward the family with a night at the movies, the ballpark or the museum. Set a long-term goal or the family too. Six months of regular activity and the family gets a day at the local theme park, or a summer pass to the pool!

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