

Encouraging Your Children To Be Physically Active

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In addition to eating habits, parents can also impact the amount of physical activity their children engage in. The increased prevalence of overweight children is a result of the dramatic decrease in youth physical activity. Nearly half of adolescents aged 12 to 21 years are not vigorously active on a regular basis and fourteen percent report no recent physical activity whatsoever. Physical activity should be the norm and should not be excluded from the lives of children. Instead of active games and activities, play has become a sedentary activity centered on video games, the Internet and television.

Why is it that children are not interested in getting physical activity? Could it be partly because children across the country are growing up in a school environment that does not provide daily outdoor recess and often only provides physical education one day per week? Could it be that working parents do not have any daylight left when they return home to supervise their children outdoors to play or to limit the amount of sedentary activities their kids engage in such as watching television or playing video games? It may be a combination of a lot of things, some of which are out of our control. One could argue that parenting in general is more complex than it has ever been because of the fast-paced, highly technological environment that our children are growing up in.

Here are some tips to get your kids active and to avoid becoming an overweight statistic:

- Encourage regular outdoor play and activities for your children. Children naturally move more when they are outside. Encourage daily outdoor activity all year.
- Limit video games, computer time and television to no more than 2-3 hours daily. Make a schedule, or set a rule that the child must "ask permission" before using the computer or game system.
- Set some rules together: such as "No video games during the daylight hours" or "Only on weekends." If children help set the rules, they are more likely to follow them.
- Provide outlets for activity. A swing set is a good investment, as are kick balls, footballs, badminton sets, hula-hoops, jump ropes and wiffle ball sets.
- Get involved in your school or community. There are currently numerous health initiatives targeting these issues. The "Walk to School" initiative (www.walktoschool.org) focuses on increasing physical activity in children by starting community walking programs. The "Action for Healthy Kids Initiative" (www.healthykidschallenge.com) brings together schools and children's health and nutrition organizations in an effort to improve the health and educational performance of kids through better nutrition and physical activity in schools.

Solutions to these issues are possible, though they do take some effort. Making a choice to include strategies every day will go a long way to help your kids and family adopt a healthy lifestyle.

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