



Everyone in the family needs exercise, so why not try these fun ways to help every member of your family stay fit? Children will look forward to exercising when it's part of a fun family time together.

Get sporty

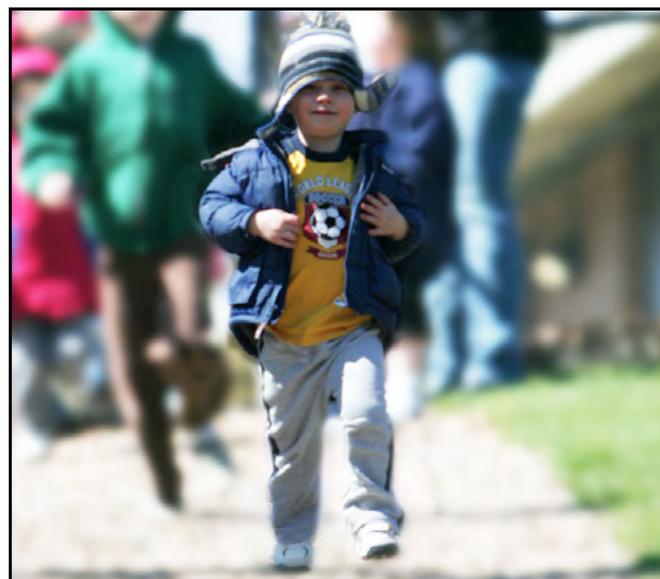
Try swimming, hiking, biking, horseback riding, bowling, dancing, tennis, and in-line skating. While at first your children may need your help, the time spent helping them develop skills will be worth it as they become more and more skilled. One smart family plays tennis together and brings many baskets of balls with them to the court. The children hit and chase the balls while the grown-ups get in as much tennis as they can. These activities are fun and healthy for everyone, and the children will develop strong muscles and gain skills they can use for a lifetime.

Join children in their sports

If your children are in an organized sport, take some time to practice with them. One mom goes out to regularly kick a ball around with her soccer-playing children. They get practice, Mom gets exercise, and everyone has fun together.

Play games together

Try a family game of kickball. This works great even with the youngest children if you have a really big ball, though they may need some help knowing which way to run. Try traditional games, such as hopscotch and jump-rope. Try a family race. Play Frisbee or ball. Badminton or volleyball can be fun, especially if you use a balloon for badminton and a supersized ball for volleyball. These games don't have to be competitive—just relax and enjoy playing together.



Babies need exercise too

While they are not ready for jumping jacks and toe touches, babies have their own needs for exercise. Many babies do not spend much time on their tummies, since it is recommended that young children should be put to sleep on their backs because it lessens the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. Tummy time for young babies helps them build muscles in their necks and shoulders. Give young babies ten minutes of tummy time a day, and make it fun by talking and playing with your baby. If your baby needs a break from tummy time, try again later. But keep helping your child strengthen those important muscles.

Older infants can be encouraged to retrieve balls or toys themselves, rather than you doing it for them. Play games and use toys to encourage older infants to crawl and cruise holding onto the furniture. Toys tempt them to use these skills, giving them needed practice. Remember, keep it fun!



Tricks for getting more exercise

Parents of young children face more challenges in getting exercise than parents with older children. Younger children need more supervision and they have fewer independent skills. But there are some tricks to fitting exercise in for you while your children are having fun. Take them to the park with their tricycles or bikes and walk the paths as they ride. If you have a toddler who can't go very fast, tape an old broom handle to the bike and push her. You get exercise and they love going fast! If your children are independent bikers you may find yourself out of breath trying to keep up.

Swimming is great exercise for children, but when they are young you must supervise them closely, making it impossible to swim laps for exercise. While you are staying within arms' reach of your little swimmers, you can be jogging in the water. Water has much greater resistance than air and makes your workout much more effective.

It's easy to just sit on the bench at the park while your little ones play, but if you get up and play with them on the equipment, the exercise will energize you. Exercise also helps manage stress, and being a parent can be very stressful. Help your children and yourself to greater well-being by finding ways to fit exercise into your family life.

Household chores are great exercise

Plenty of household chores are good for active children: raking leaves, shoveling snow, and digging and weeding in the garden are all good exercise. Other jobs children can do include carrying in groceries and helping to wash the car. Turn on the music and dance while doing indoor housework. This will make it more fun and you'll all get plenty of exercise.

Physical activity has plenty of benefits for children. They sleep and eat better, and many child development specialists believe children behave better when they have enough exercise. Keeping in good physical shape will help your children develop a positive self-concept. Physical activity can also reduce stress. It can help children handle the normal stresses of growing up as well as any unusual stress along the way. And best of all, you help set your child on a path of healthy living.

PENN STATE



Cooperative Extension
College of Agricultural Sciences

Visit Penn State Extension on the web: extension.psu.edu

This publication is available in alternative media on request.

Penn State is an equal opportunity, affirmative action employer, and is committed to providing employment opportunities to minorities, women, veterans, individuals with disabilities, and other protected groups. Nondiscrimination: <http://guru.psu.edu/policies/AD85.html>

Copyright ©2014 The Pennsylvania State University

Claudia C. Mincemoyer, Ph.D., Better Kid Care Program Director
341 North Science Park Road – Suite 208, State College, PA 16803
Web site: extension.psu.edu/youth/betterkidcare

Supported by funds from the Office of Child Development and Early Learning, a joint office of the Pennsylvania Departments of Education and Public Welfare.

PC_FCO_ActivePlay-Jul 01, 2014