

Be Active with your Family

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Physical Activity has many benefits from preventing chronic disease to putting us in a better mood, sharpening our focus, reducing stress and even improving sleep. Yet many Americans fall short of daily exercise recommendations. The United States Department of Agriculture recommends 60 minutes of daily activity for children and 150 minutes per week for adults. Parents who exercise set a good example for living a healthy style and if your family finds fun in exercising together you are likely teaching your child to enjoy moving for a lifetime.

When it comes to exercising doing what you like is going to keep you moving. If you enjoy a peaceful walk then make that your go to exercise, biking, swimming and hiking are all good examples of other activities you might find fun that can help you stay fit. Try some of the tips in this article to create family fun activity that will benefit everyone.

Make it a wildlife adventure-If your family likes wildlife and nature take a walk and check out what is in the neighborhood or your back yard. For younger children you can make it an eye spy game while you walk. Older children might like to challenge you on the walk by making you guess what they see, and teenagers may have their earbuds on, but you can still point when you see something to share. Walking supports a healthy bone structure in both adults and children and gives you time together.

According to an article in BMC Public health owning a dog provides the owner on average about 22 minutes more of walking time a day than a non-pet owner. If you have a dog make sure to take the kids along when you go for a walk and if you don't have a pet take a special friend like a favorite toy or teddy bear for a walk to increase your cardiovascular workout each day.

Ride bikes- many cities and towns now have bike lanes to promote safe bike riding. If you are unsure about how your children will do riding a bike in a congested area, test it out before you go so you know they understand that bike riding is fun, but safety is important. Riding bikes can produce aerobic exercise and children should participate in vigorous to intense aerobic activity three times a week meaning they are breathing hard and their hearts are really pumping.

Hike in the woods or park – New Jersey is fortunate to have many different outdoor areas that can be enjoyed. Tracking your walk is a fun way to stay motivated. If you go for a walk or hike use an app to track how far you went. When you get home have children record how far you traveled by foot. Set a goal to walk to your favorite place by calculating recorded distances.

Tracking your daily distance gives you a goal and something fun to do together. On rainy days try using indoor steps to pretend you are mountain climbing to your favorite destination.

Pull out the old favorites- many families have sidewalk chalk, jump ropes, hula hoops or balls laying around, combine these playtime favorites and use them to create an obstacle course. Take turns competing against yourself or each other. You don't even need to leave your yard, sidewalk or living room to find fun way to challenge your body, mind and each other.

The course can be as easy or as hard as you like, and it can change from day to day. An obstacle course is a good way to add in some muscle building exercises using your body's own resistance like pushups or planks. In addition to the 150 minutes of moderate to intense aerobic exercise Adults require each week, they should have two days that include muscle strengthening activity.

Make it a parade- grab some pots and pans and wooden spoons and have everyone jump in line for a parade march around add some spins and make some good old fashion noise. Some talented marching bands add dance moves into their routine so encourage some alternatives moves while having fun. If your family is already musical and have instruments use them to put on a mini parade and entertain the neighbors as you march by.

Dance Party – Music lifts spirits and moving to music is an added benefit. Dancing can be done inside or out, and you can take turns choosing the music. If your family has a multigenerational living arrangement this is a great way to share memories and create new ones with a varied music choice.

No matter how you move it is important to find time each day to be active. Discover what is fun and take turns choosing an activity you all do together to create a life-time of health for the entire family.

Dall, P.M., Ellis, S.L.H., Ellis, B.M. *et al.* The influence of dog ownership on objective measures of free-living physical activity and sedentary behaviour in community-dwelling older adults: a longitudinal case-controlled study. *BMC Public Health* **17**, 496 (2017).

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