



How to Keep Your Family Active

Being physically active has many health benefits, no matter what age you are. It's especially important to help kids develop and grow into healthy adults. **The American Heart Association recommends that kids and teens (ages 6-17) get at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity every day.** With a little effort, we can help kids learn healthy habits now and find activities they can love for a lifetime.

Why is it important for kids to be active?

Just like in adults, increased physical activity is associated with an increased life expectancy and decreased risk of many diseases and health problems. In other words, it means a longer and healthier life! There are also some benefits that may appeal to kids' competitive nature and desire to do their best. Active kids are more likely to have:

- a healthy weight
- stronger, healthier bones and muscles
- improved brain function, including memory, attention and problem-solving
- better academic performance with less inappropriate classroom behavior
- lower long-term risk of cardiovascular diseases, diabetes and some kinds of cancer
- fewer symptoms of anxiety and depression
- improved mental health and psychological well-being, including confidence and self-esteem

How do I encourage my child to be active?

Children are naturally active. As they grow into adolescents, they tend to become less active.

This is especially true for girls, who may need even more support and encouragement to stay active. Don't be surprised or disappointed if your kids' interests shift or they lose interest in activities they used to love. Help them find other activities they can enjoy instead of becoming inactive.

What if my child is uncoordinated, disabled, or has a weight problem?

All children, even differently-abled ones, need to be physically active. Activity may be particularly helpful for the physical and psychological well-being of kids with a disability or weight problem. Support them in being as active as possible. Avoid comparing them to other children or shaming them if they're not able to do as much. Celebrate their achievements and successes. Above all, keep it safe, and keep it fun!

Here are our top 20 tips to help you and your family be more active:

- 1. Be a role model for an active lifestyle.** Experts say that what kids want is time with their parents. To give them that, don't just send them out to play – start moving more yourself and find ways to be active together as a family.
- 2. Build more activity into your everyday routine.** Take the stairs wherever you go. Park farther away from your destination and walk the rest of the way. Walk around the house or your neighborhood while you're talking on the phone.

3. Physical activity should be fun! Encourage kids to keep trying activities to discover the ones they like and will stick with. If they're social, try a team sport or dance class. If they'd prefer to be active on their own, yoga or running might be a better fit.

4. Put the screens on hold. Instead of heading right for the TV after dinner, make that family activity time. Take a walk, practice a sport, or play a game of tag or hide-and-seek. Don't use the TV or a device as a babysitter.

5. Provide kids with opportunities to be active. Give them active toys and games, like bikes, skateboards, roller skates, scooters, jump ropes, balls and sports equipment.

6. Get familiar with community facilities near you, like recreation centers, bike paths, and parks.

7. When safe, let your kids walk or bike places instead of always driving them in the car. For example, you could walk or bike to school or the bus stop together.

8. If your child is very inactive now, start slowly. Increase the amount and intensity of activity gradually each week. This may help them avoid discomfort or injury and adjust to a more active lifestyle without becoming discouraged.

9. Praise, rewards, and encouragement help kids to stay active. Don't use physical activity as a punishment.

10. Schedule it. Having trouble making time for physical activity? Set an alarm on your phone or schedule it on your calendar - and treat it like any other important appointment.

11. Have a goal as a family, like being active for at least 150 minutes each week, to help you all stay on track. If you're the competitive type, make it a challenge amongst your family members to see who can consistently meet their goals over time.

12. Shake up your family's after-school/after-work routine. Join your kids for a bike ride, or shoot hoops before starting on homework and chores. You'll all feel better and think better!

13. Put on some music, and take a dance break! It can re-energize a study session, lazy Sunday, or game night. Let each person take a turn as DJ so everyone's favorites get played.

14. Get your garden on! Gardening, lawn mowing, and yard work are great ways to get active outdoors. No yard? No problem. Try container gardening or a local community garden.

15. Tune into fitness during TV time. Walk or jog in place or on a treadmill, lift weights, or do yoga while you watch a show. Break up a TV binge with a bit of activity between episodes. Or challenge the kids to see who can do the most pushups, or jumping jacks during commercial breaks.

16. Make active chore cards. Let each family member draw a card each day with a different active task that needs to be done. Cleaning up after dinner, walking the dog, taking the trash out, and unloading the dishwasher are all good ways to get your family off the couch - and get chores done.

17. Stay active when you travel. Instead of a bus tour, see the sights by walking or bicycling. If you'll be spending a lot of time in an airport, walk while you wait! Throw a jump rope or resistance band in your suitcase. Take advantage of the hotel fitness center or swimming pool.

18. Get active for a cause. Community events like marathons are a great way to do something healthy while giving back. Some even offer fitness training, team opportunities, and prizes!

19. Change up date night. An evening out doesn't have to mean dinner and a movie. Keep a list of activities that would be fun to do together, like hiking, bowling, miniature golf, dancing, or indoor rock climbing. Get creative!

20. It's a dog's life. A dog can be a great walking or running companion. If you don't have a dog of your own, volunteer at a local shelter, or help out a neighbor who is too busy to walk their dog.

