

Are you an active family?

Obesity is a national epidemic and children are not immune to it. The numbers of children who are overweight or obese have nearly doubled since 1970, and children are now being diagnosed with diseases previously only seen in adults: high blood pressure, type II diabetes, and heart disease. Active children are not only less likely to be overweight, but they are also more likely to have strong bones, a healthy heart, do better in school, sleep better, and generally grow up to be fit adults.

As parents, we want only the best for our children. What can you do to keep your child from joining the ranks of the overweight and the obese? Here are some suggestions:

- Model healthy behavior yourself as a parent. (Children want to be like you. If you're active, the children are more likely to be active.)
- Play with your children in the yard or the park. Have contests to see how high or how far you can all jump. How fast can you ride your bicycle? Don't forget old games like tag and hide-and-seek.
- Go for a walk around your neighborhood in the evenings in the summer. Better than sitting down watching re-runs. (Remember to take your dog if you have one. Even furry friends can get overweight.)
- Help everyone in the family learn to ride a bike and then go for a family bike ride in a quiet neighborhood or on some trails. (Don't forget your helmets!)
- Use your creativity. Take your school-aged child on a Huckleberry Finn hike or a Nancy Drew mystery run rather than just a walk around the block.
- Don't just run and walk with your kids. Run like a gorilla. Walk like a spider. Hop like a bunny. Stretch like a cat.
- Plan your family vacations around a physical activity: hiking, snorkeling, skiing, swimming or camping. Take along a ball or Frisbee to burn off excess energy at rest stops along the way. And if you're flying, go for long walks around the terminal while you're waiting for your flight.
- Make chores fun. Who can pull the most weeds out of the flower bed? Who can clean one side of the car the fastest? Who can shovel the most snow?
- Vary the activities and give each child a chance to choose one. Anything active counts, from batting cages to fast-food play areas. It just needs to be active.
- If you are a regular walker, ask your kids along on their bikes. They can keep up with you more easily and you can connect with your kids as you exercise.
- Give fitness-related gifts to your kids for their birthdays (e.g. bicycles, in-line skates, basketballs etc). Just be sure that the child has expressed an interest in the sport...