



# PREMIER MEDICAL ASSOCIATES

## **Health and Safety Corner** **Physical Activity in Children**

Remember those days of our childhood filled with tag, hopscotch, bike-riding and pick-up games? Even in the winter, we spent much of our time sledding, making snow angels and having snowball fights. With the explosion of video games, 24-hour children's television programming and instant messaging and texting, it seems that many of those activities are a thing of the past. There is no doubt that sedentary activities have been replacing physical activities in our youth, and unfortunately, the obesity rates reflect this.

A scary fact is that **the percentage of overweight children aged 6-11 years has more than doubled in the past 30 years.** These children are known to be at increased risk of becoming obese adults, many of whom will face serious health problems. Among the list of **diseases associated with obesity are cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure, stroke, diabetes, some cancers, and gallbladder disease.** Many of these diseases are becoming increasingly more common in younger adults and even children. The CDC has predicted that one in three U.S. children born in 2000 will become diabetic unless these trends reverse.

One contributing factor towards our children becoming overweight is the decrease in physical activity. Almost 25% of children get less than 30 minutes of physical activity per day. This percentage increases as they age, with nearly half of teenagers not staying vigorously active on a regular basis.

So how much exercise do children need? **The current recommendations are that children ages 5-18 years should aim for at least 1 hour of activity each day,** which can be spread throughout the day into 15 minute or more increments. Sounds like a lot! But this does not mean that you have to run your child on the treadmill for an hour straight. We'll get to ideas about incorporating exercise, but it is also important to know why regular physical activity is so beneficial. Potential benefits include:

- \*building and maintaining healthy bones, muscles and joints
- \*helping with weight control, building lean muscle and reducing fat
- \*promoting better sleep, which increases the ability to handle physical and emotional challenges better
- \*improving self-esteem and autonomy
- \*increasing academic motivation (in fact, studies have linked stronger academic achievement, increased concentration, and improved reading and writing test scores to schools with physical activity programs)

All right, we now know why it's important, but how do we get those little couch potatoes moving? Here are a few hints on motivating your children:

1. The most crucial element is to **make it FUN!** A child having fun will want to continue over and over again (to your exhaustion), and will require much less motivation.
2. It is also essential to **have a positive attitude** with your child. You must be the role model, and without that, your child will feel this is a chore rather than something fun to do. You might even find that you're having a lot more fun with some added lifestyle benefits as well!

3. Make sure that you're **selecting activities that are appropriate for your child** and his/her developmental stage. If they are frustrated and feel that they're failing, they will not want to continue.
4. Listen to your children! **Ease up if they're tired, injured or bored.** You will not be able to go from 10 minutes of activity to 60, so allow them to build up their strength and endurance.
5. Realize that **different personalities flock to different activities.** Some will love team sports, whereas others will prefer individual sports. Just encourage them to try new things, because they may not realize how much fun they'll have doing something different.
6. **Turn "failed situations" into growing successful experiences.** If they lose a race, focus on how much faster they've become or how their endurance is building. Also, don't pressure to always win or be the best--it's hard not to compare to other children, but too much negative pressure will turn them off. It is more likely that their skills will catch up if they're enjoying themselves rather than feeling stressed.
7. **Reward progress.** Keep charts and provide non-food incentives such as movie tickets, or trips to the zoo. Or reward them with sports equipment that will promote other activity. A little bribery can go a long way!

Now that you are armed with knowing how important it is to increase your child's physical activity, and with some techniques to try to motivate them, look for ten activities you can use at home in this newsletter! Next month, we'll start to look at nutrition.

### 10 Ways to Exercise Without Knowing It

1. Dance! Nothing gets you moving more than some good shaking music. Have a dance contest or dance party--even the video game Dance, Dance Revolution can get the heart rate up
2. Develop your own circuit-training program: have workout stations such as climbing the stairs, jumping rope, sitting on the wall, biceps curls with canned goods, or whatever your imagination can think of! Use a timer to prompt moving from station to station
3. Schedule family walks after dinner instead of watching television
4. Do a Science project: measure heart rate after various movements such as walking, jumping, skipping and hopping
5. Play "keep the balloon up", by chasing a balloon and tapping it into the air without allowing it to touch the ground. Make it more challenging by adding more balloons.
6. Change "Follow the Leader" to "Fitness with the Leader", which is follow the leader using exercises. This can also be adapted to "Simon Says" -- "Simon does do jumping jacks/hop on one leg/squat."
7. Change Freeze Tag to Boot Camp Tag--the person frozen has to do lunges, jumping jacks or sit-ups until unfrozen by another player.
8. Invite friends and family over for a barbecue or picnic and play touch football, soccer, or make up an obstacle course.
9. Go to the pool or water park--kids seem to want to go all day when they're in the water (just don't forget the sunscreen!)
10. Have spontaneous competitions such as racing to a certain point or

seeing who can balance the longest in one position. You'll be amazed at how much giggling this can generate!

### Recipes of the Month

#### Halloween Crunch Mix

1 cup roasted pumpkin seeds

1 cup dried cranberries

1 cup candy corn

1 cup roasted peanuts

1 cup corn cereal such as Chex

1 cup pretzel sticks

Combine all the ingredients in a large bowl and mix well.

#### Healthier Oatmeal Cookies

½ lb. (2 sticks) of butter, softened

1 cup brown sugar

½ granulated sugar

2 eggs

1 tsp vanilla

1 ½ cups of whole wheat flour

1 tsp baking soda

1 tsp cinnamon

½ tsp salt (optional)

3 cups oats

1 cup raisins

Preheat oven to 350°. Beat together butter and sugar. Add eggs and vanilla, beat well. Combine flour, baking soda, cinnamon and salt. Stir in oats and raisins, mix well. Drop tablespoons onto ungreased cookie sheet. Bake 10-12 minutes. Makes 4 dozen. Easy to freeze and use in your children's lunches.

#### Halloween Maple Cider Punch

1 cup orange juice

3 TBSP maple syrup  
4 cups apple cider, chilled  
1 cup ginger ale, chilled

Pour the orange juice into a small saucepan and stir in the maple syrup. Place over medium heat and bring to almost a boil. Remove from the heat, stir once or twice, and let cool to room temperature. Pour the apple cider into a pitcher and add the cooled orange juice and ginger ale. Mix well. Serve over ice. Makes 6 servings.

Thanks to Cecelia Coughlin and Rachel Troy for submitting this month's recipes!

Patient Information

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