

Fit Facts™

FROM THE AMERICAN COUNCIL ON EXERCISE®

KIDS IN MOTION

By the time they reach high school, 63 percent of children are no longer physically active. Why? Try TV, video games and personal computers, compounded by too much munching of high-calorie foods that add unwanted and unneeded pounds.

If your kids fall within this group, you don't have to shake your head sadly. You can set a good example, be a role model and do the right things so your kids will, too.

Get off the couch and on a bike with your kids. Introduce them to exercise that's fun. Eat healthy. Instead of high-calorie foods and snacks, turn to fruits and low- or non-fat foods. And once you get kids moving in the direction of fitness, chances are they'll keep going for the rest of their lives.

START 'EM YOUNG

Did you know that physically active children have fewer chronic health problems than kids who are sedentary? Children who are fit have other statistics in their favor, too. They're better able to meet the demands of daily physical activity. They do better in physical-performance tests. They have a stronger self-image and more self-confidence, and they demonstrate greater improvement in skill- and health-related fitness.

When you consider the facts, it makes good sense to encourage physical activity when your children are young. Parents, teachers and fitness professionals all have a role to play. Each can help kids think positively about exercise and motivate them to make regular physical activity a lifetime pursuit.

MOM AND DAD ARE THE BEST MOTIVATORS

As a parent, it's up to you to play the biggest part — bigger than a teacher, more important than a fitness professional. Your child looks to you for examples on how to talk, dress, act and lead a physically active — or a non-physically active — life.



Set a good example for your kids. Instead of spending the evening in front of the television, find some activity that will keep you moving. In warm weather, bike outdoors; if it's too cold, get a stationary bike, a treadmill or a trampoline.

And it's never too late or too early to help your kids build strength and endurance. Push-ups and pull-ups are an excellent way to build upper-body strength. Jungle gyms and monkey bars are great for kids because they utilize their own body weight. And they're loads of fun.

Keep in mind that kids are not always naturally limber and that their muscles

may be tight and vulnerable to injury during the growth spurts that occur during the elementary years. Be sure to include stretching as a part of your fitness activities.

Make sure that you concentrate on the positive aspects of exercise. It's a chance for a family to be together, to share good times and fun. Avoid competition, discipline and embarrassment — things that can turn good times into moments of dread. And praise your children for trying. Praise them for doing.

IT'S REALLY UP TO YOU

You can't tell kids that being active is fun. You have to show them. So take your kids hiking, biking, dancing, sledding, swimming and in-line skating. Skip rope or shoot baskets with them.

Plan outings and activities that involve walking, like a trip to the zoo or the park, a nature trail hike, or even a walk through the mall. It's really up to you. If you want your kids to be healthy, happy teens and adults, it's up to you to do something about it.

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