

## **Summer time can mean family time!**

### **Get active with your family and improve your physical and mental health**

About this time in the summer, many parents start hearing words they dread from their children...“I’m bored!” If you’ve already used up every great idea you have to keep them busy this summer, try getting outside as a family and set a goal to be healthy and active—together. You will all improve your physical and mental health.

Many kids are involved in sporting activities that keep them active and fight obesity. Despite this fact, childhood obesity is a problem in our country. Spending time together exercising and being active is a great way to improve your family’s health, sleep, sense of well-being, endurance, and relationships.

Some of the benefits of exercise, according to the US Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration include:

- enhanced ability to sleep with more restful sleep
- improved memory and ability to concentrate
- decreased irritability and anxiety
- improved self-esteem
- weight loss
- improved muscle tone
- increased endurance
- increased mobility

The mental health benefits of exercise have also been well documented. Benefits include decreased depression, irritability, anxiety, and stress. In fact, a study completed in 2000 by James A. Blumenthal, Ph.D. showed that in adults, exercise is as effective as medication in decreasing symptoms of major depression.

### **How can physical activity as a family help us?**

Spending time together promotes confidence, closeness, and improved relationships. By doing physical activities together, you show your children that health is important and you model behavior that will improve their lives. Since inactive children are likely to become inactive adults, you are providing them with skills and knowledge that last a lifetime.

Children who spend time with their parents and siblings feel secure and loved. This increases their self-esteem and improves their mood as well as promotes family unity.

### **How much physical activity should my children get?**

The American Heart Association recommends that all children age 2 and older participate in at least 30 minutes of enjoyable, moderate-intensity physical activities every day that are

developmentally appropriate and varied. Limiting television, video games and other sedentary activities will help increase their level of physical activity.

### **What kinds of physical activities should we do?**

The type of physical activity you do is not as important as getting out there and doing it. Making it fun for all involved will make it more likely that it will continue. For example, take tennis or golf lessons together or just schedule time weekly to play. Make sure you set the time aside without allowing anything to get in the way. Set a time and stick with it. Structuring your time will make it more likely that you will follow through. Activities that involve aerobic exercise such as basketball, bicycling, soccer, and walking are important.

Some great examples of things you and your children can do together are:

In-line skating	Bicycling
Basketball	Walking
Soccer	Tennis
Golf	Swimming

### **Go "Webwalking"**

If you have access to the internet, there is a great program that could help your family walk your way to better health! Start by getting each family member a pedometer, a device that measures how many steps you take. Then, each person can chart their miles or steps on a virtual walk across the USA on the American Discovery Trail. It covers 5048 miles (or 504,800 steps). There are printable maps, motivational gear, and great ideas to help everyone take a virtual walk across the US!

Wendy Bumgardner, a certified marathon coach who served eight years on the board of the largest organization of walking clubs in the USA, has great walking ideas that you can do as a family on [about.com](http://about.com). For example, you can count your steps for a week and then try to increase the number of steps each person takes. Kids can try to increase their number each week or you can combine all steps and reward the whole family for meeting the goal together.

Spending time together doing physical activities will decrease the boredom and increase the fun for your entire family. Making it a priority will be time well spent—for all of you.