

Family Fitness

Family Health & Fitness Day USA is a national health and fitness event for families on the last Saturday in September. The 12th annual event promotes family involvement in physical activity. For more information, visit: www.fitnessday.com/family.

According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), physical activity and good nutrition are essential elements in preventing obesity and chronic diseases among children, adolescents and adults. The CDC recommends that children and adolescents participate in at least 60 minutes of moderate activity most days of the week; adults should participate in a minimum of 30 minutes of moderate physical activity (or 20 minutes of vigorous physical activity) most days of the week. However, a recent study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association found that while more than 90 percent of the children aged 9-11 met the recommended level of at least an hour per day of moderate or vigorous exercise, by age 15 only 31 percent hit the recommended level on weekdays (and only 17 percent met the mark on weekends). In addition, over 50 percent of American adults do not get enough physical activity to provide health benefits.

Instead of viewing exercise as an unpleasant chore, get the whole family involved and turn exercise into a fun activity and a way to spent quality time with each other. Some ideas include:

- Plant a family garden.
- Plan vacations around an activity such as hiking in a national park, swimming in the ocean, biking to a destination, etc.

- Celebrate the seasons and go sledding, swimming, rake the leaves, or fly a kite.
- Limit the time spent in front of the TV and computer for the whole family to no more than 2 hours per day.
- Start a family tradition such as taking a walk together after dinner, or planning a monthly basketball tournament with family and friends.
- Divide physical chores among all members of the family (i.e. vacuuming, mowing the lawn, sweeping).
- Participate in community events such as benefit runs/ walks, litter patrol, farmer's markets, art walks, outdoor music concerts, etc.
- Keep a container in the car with a Frisbee, jump rope, kite, or other sports gear so that you are always ready for fun if the opportunity arises.
- Walk or ride your bike as a mode of transportation (not just for exercise)—if possible, try biking to the store, to work, to school, the park, etc.

Remember, regular physical activity can help build a strong foundation for a healthy life. For both adults and children alike, it can increase self-esteem, relieve stress, help control weight, build and maintain healthy bones, muscles and joints, and create lasting memories.

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