

THE IMPORTANCE OF EXERCISE FOR KIDS...

Or as Willy calls it “GET OFF YOUR BEE-HIND!”

We all know that exercise is good for us. Being active is important no matter how old you are. But especially for kids, it builds strong muscles and bones and helps keep their weight under control. At least one in seven preschoolers is already overweight, and that number goes up in the elementary and middle school years. Being overweight at a young age can lead to obesity in adulthood, which can lead to conditions like diabetes, heart related issues and even cancer. A good start to avoid this is one hour of exercise per day starting in a young age.



After a day that includes exercise your child will sleep better and be happier. He or she will likely be more motivated in school. And mastering any activity that involves other children will build self-esteem and social skills. Let's get started! By being a good example, you can put start good habits in your own home. An obese parent has a 50% chance that their child will be obese as well. Sometimes the word “exercise” sounds like work. Change that word to “play” and you'll get a more enthusiastic response. Everyone wants to go play so let's do it together.

You have to be the role model. Put the remote control down, push back from the computer, take your feet off the coffee table, hide the chips. You don't have to tell the kids that exercise is good for them. Tell them they're going to have some fun. And you can have fun right alongside them. They're watching you. And if you want them to build these good exercise habits for life, it's more than helpful if they see that you have them as well.



No yelling. If an activity isn't fun, a kid won't do it. They don't get the tennis racket back far enough? That's okay. They keep missing the hoop? They'll get better. Find the activity or sport that appeals to them and just keep the encouragement, cheers and big smiles coming. Don't forget that it's not the outcome that matters, it's the journey. The *fun* journey.

How old is your child?

Preschoolers need play and exercise that helps them develop important motor skills. Kick or throw a ball with your little one. Hop around with them or play hide and seek. You can play follow the leader or tag. You can run a little obstacle course. You can swing on a swing, play miniature golf, learn how to swim, and dance. Think of all the things that little people can do and that you can do with them!

Although some sports leagues may be open to kids as young as 4, organized and team sports are not recommended at this age. Preschoolers can get confused by complex rules and often lack the attention span, skills, and coordination needed to play sports. And that might lead to frustration and...tears.



Depending on where you live, you might find more or fewer activities for your child. Ask your neighbors and friends for suggestions. Do you have a pool in your community? Are there community parks where you can play or hike?

School aged kids, left to their own devices, will spend a mind-boggling amount of time on sedentary pursuits like watching TV and playing computer games. Your challenge will be to help them find physical activities they enjoy and feel successful doing. These can include almost anything from soccer to baseball...basketball to martial arts as well as biking, hiking, dance or gymnastics. Who knows, you might even have a future Olympic archer in the house.



As kids get older, differences in ability and personality become more apparent. Commitment and interest level often go along with ability, which is why it's important to find an activity that is right for your child. Don't forget that interests change. What was fun yesterday might be a big bore today. You don't have to raise the next Tiger Woods or Serena Williams. You just want to raise a kid with confidence and one who will *get off her "bee-hind"* to stay fit!

Now that you have the basics, here are some ideas that might help get the ball rolling:

1. Limit screen time. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that kids get no more than one to two hours of screen time a day, whether that's watching TV, surfing online or playing video games. But many children spend four or more hours each day in front of a screen. To keep an eye on things, remove TVs from bedrooms and put the computer in a shared space where you can supervise.
2. You don't need a home gym. If you have some active toys in reach, you can have fun anytime. Think about jumps ropes, a beach ball, a game of Twister. Hula hoops...one for everyone in the family. If you have room to play outside, you might like a football or soccer ball. Toys like this encourage kids to get out of the house.



3. Walk. Don't park near the entrance to the store or library. Take the stairs instead of an elevator or escalator. Look at what's around you and talk about it. Talk about where you're going to set a goal. Then it will feel easier to get there.
4. Run. There are so many charity run/walks in which you and your child can participate. Find a charity that suits your family and make a difference. It can be a family activity to spend time "in training" for this event. Depending upon the fitness of you and your child, don't worry about making it to the finish line. Just get out and have some fun. The fact that you did this at all is the reward.
5. Exercise can be a reward. Everyone likes a break from homework or helping around the house. "If you help me clear the table, we can play kickball for twenty minutes." "When you finish that chapter, you can shoot some hoops for half an hour." This isn't exactly bribery, but it will get the job done and will give your child something to look forward to.
6. Invite a friend. Kids love to do things with their friends. Go to a playground, the park or a local pool. If it's not a nice day, stay inside and crank up the music and have them dance 'til they drop. If they're older, is there a sport or activity they'd like to try together? The more time your child spends having face-to-face time with others, the more his social confidence and abilities will grow.



7. Make a routine. A family bike ride or hike every Saturday morning is something to look forward to. It can be as simple as all taking a walk around the neighborhood after dinner. Use it as a reward for after the dishes are done.
8. Gardening gets you outside. Fresh air and sunshine are mood and vitamin D boosters as well. Enjoy the benefits of growing your own food and the exercise that comes with keeping everything growing, healthy and beautiful. Do you have to rake the leaves? Play in them before you scoop them up. Have to bring the wood inside for the winter? Even the littlest member of the family can bring in some small branches.
9. Baby steps. Anyone can do just about anything for five minutes. If a grumpy face greets your suggestion of an activity, say "what about we just try this for five minutes?" You can then encourage that sixth and seventh minute. The next time you try it, see how far you get. You can build in a reward when you hit a milestone. Twenty minutes...half hour. If after a few days your little one still isn't enjoying this activity, give up and try something else. Remember, we're here to have *fun*.



10. Do you come from a family of golfers or tennis players or bowlers? Skiers or swimmers? The little ones really want to do what the big kids do. Start them young and see how they do. If it's not the sport for them, make sure to find something else where they can excel and bring the rest of the family out to cheer.
11. What would *you* like to do today? Kids love to be in charge. Let your child choose the activity. Once they know that you'll be doing something every day. Give them some options and be happy to go along with their choice. Praise them for their choice as well.
12. Can we get a dog? Chances are that your child won't really take on all the chores and responsibilities of taking care of the family dog no matter how much he begged, pleaded and promised. But dogs need to be walked two or three times a day as well as have active playtime. So if you think that your children can be relied on for at least that much, think about giving in. That's more exercise for everyone and maybe some very happy faces.



13. Make it up as you go along. Play hopscotch on the street. Do jumping jacks if you have to wait in line someplace. Try some sit-ups when there's a commercial break during your show. Race to the school bus. Set up a scavenger hunt in the house on a rainy day.
14. Get video games that work up a sweat. There are games where children have to move around in order to win. And they're moving. Think about this at the arcade too.

Remember to offer positive feedback for everything that your child tries. It's not how many times we fall down that matters, it's how many times we get up. Make it genuine. Be proud of the extra steps taken or the extra effort it took. Some kids are shy or might be self-conscious about their abilities. Your job is to give them the confidence and tools that will last a lifetime.

What do you do together as a family? How does your little one stay active and in shape? Share it with us to inspire others. Please leave a comment. Thank you!