



Family Fitness **Tiffany Hall 06/05/10**

The great joy of exercise is that it doesn't have to be done alone. By exercising together, families can make it more fun and motivating. If you make movement a priority in your life, your kids will too. Exercise boosts confidence, self-esteem, helps to regulate sleeping patterns during crucial growth development and has proven results in combating depression and eating disorders in young teens.

Thanks to technology and increased sedentary lifestyles, kids are spending more time inside and less time moving. Mix this lack of mobility with poisonous, energy-charged junk diets – where even vitamin water has the same amount of calories as three bowls of sugary cereal and a lemonade has the same energy as four ice cream sandwiches – and it's no wonder we have 1.5 million Australians under the age of 18 battling obesity. This puts our kids at risk of developing type 2 diabetes, asthma, high blood pressure and sleep apnoea as well as the social and emotional challenges, many overweight kids battle.

The number of obese kids has tripled, so if you're worried about your child's weight, you're not alone. And the best way to ensure that your kids are moving is to move with them.

Now, if exercising has never been a part of your life, don't freak out. I'm not suggesting that you commit your family to an elite athletic program. The Heart Foundation of Australia suggests that you get your body moving for 30 minutes on most days of the week and that you encourage your kids to join you. Not sure where to start? Here is some stuff you can do with you family. Keep it playful and positive and you'll soon have one of the healthiest families on the block.

Exercising with kids

- Walk the dog.
- Go for a picnic.
- Go camping.
- Go bowling.
- Walk your kids to school with their friends. Or, if your child is old enough, ride bikes to school together.
- Energetic holidays. Make sure your family holidays allow for lots of activity: beach cricket, surfing, kayaking, volleyball, bush walking and lots of active play.
- Boost your child's self-esteem and confidence by introducing them to a sport.
- Get involved in a sport as a family such as martial arts, dance, tennis or football.
- Drop your kids off early to school so you can play a game with them and their friends in the playground before school starts. A game of football, netball, tunnel ball or cricket before class will increase their concentration span for the day.

- Make exercise before school a habit: swimming, walks, light jogging or active playtime
- Bike ride to breakfast on the weekends.
- Shopping! No matter what age, shopping is a great way to burn calories with your daughters. (Shopping centre circuits are my favourite, and the more you buy the more resistance you add).
- Walk to the store to buy milk or the paper.
- Window wash.
- Explore local parks, rivers and beaches.
- Go indoor rock climbing.
- Beach games; running in the sand, treading water, swimming.
- Do active household chores together; washing the car, gardening, work on a family mural or create a home decorating project.
- Teach your kids to love good food. Cook healthy meals together, keep healthy snacks on hand and challenge your family to only eat out or takeaway once a week.
- Make packing healthy lunches an important and creative activity to avoid school canteen splurges.

Active playtime:

3-6 years is the best age to develop and refine motor skills through active playtime with your kids. Try these games in a local park or your backyard:

- Chasey. Incorporate locomotor movements (e.g. running, walking, skipping, sliding, galloping).
- Ball games that incorporate catching, throwing kicking, bouncing, hitting and playing.
- Monkey bars/climbing.
- Playing in the sandpit (good for developing fine movement skills).
- Hopscotch.
- Hula Hoop.
- Toss a Frisbee.
- Backyard races.
- Fly kites.
- Treasure hunts, they will get the kids running for hours.
- Never underestimate the fitness benefits, or fun factor of a decent game of hide and seek.

Combine these exercises in backyard circuits. Gather some of your favorite equipment and let the kids set up separate stations. At each station, perform a specific move for two minutes before moving on to the next station. For example, at the first station, skip with a rope; at station number two, run through a zig zag of cones; at station number three, play hula hoop; at station number four, bounce a tennis ball using alternate hands; at number five, simple star jumps.

Exercising with teens and twenty somethings

We lose five percent of our muscle mass every ten years after the age of thirty-five – if we don't do anything about it now. If you don't intentionally rebuild muscle through exercise, every ten years you need to eat 120 to 420 fewer calories each day to maintain your current weight. So if you're at a stable weight at age of 35 and don't do any kind of resistance training, while still eating the same amount of food, you are destined to put on weight.

Strength training is very important from the age of 25 onwards. If you want to exercise with your teenage kids or your children who are in their twenties, combine cardio with resistance training to maximise results for both of you. Combine walking or jogging with circuit training by stopping at park benches along the way to do sets of push ups, dips, sit-ups and squats.

- Mother, daughter walks are so important because 30 minutes of daily walking has been shown to decrease the risk of breast cancer by 30 percent and increase the rate of survival by 70 percent.
- Share the cost of a personal trainer and meet twice a week to train together.
- Find a running group.
- Join a winter boot camp.
- Try something new: pole dancing, roller derby, cardio yoga or Zumba
- Take up a new activity such as martial arts, squash, swimming, Latino dance classes or cycling.
- Set weight loss and fitness goals together: run a half marathon, swim 5km or learn a new sport.
- Join a gym together.
- Do group fitness classes together such as Body Pump or Bodybalance.

Exercising with grandchildren

Strength exercises: opt for elastic bands as resistance instead of weights

Stretching exercises: yoga classes are great for building balance as we get older to strengthen our joints and especially to take care of our hips.

Endurance exercises: the best endurance exercise to do as grandparents is aquatic. Take your grandchildren to the pool and tread water, walk laps of the pool, do an aqua aerobics class or just swim.