



Physical Activity

Parent - Family Newsletter



February 2012

Creating Balance

Physical activity encourages children's total well-being

Physical activity is a central part of children's overall well-being because their physical, mental and emotional health lies at the heart of their ability to learn and succeed. As a family, you set the tone for the way that your children will view exercise and make it a part of their daily lives. Working activity into your family's daily routine will boost not only your children's health and physical fitness, but also could enhance their ability to learn.

"Physical activity yields such amazing results," said Emily Coe, Director of Behavioral Sciences at HealthTeacher. "Activities like jumping rope, walking, playing tag and playing sports can help kids perform better in school and help them get along better with their peers. In addition, helping kids learn to enjoy physical activity of any sort provides them with a lifelong appreciation of physical activity and its benefits."

Research has repeatedly shown that physical activity directly affects the brain and its ability to learn and perform well. A University of Illinois study in 2010 showed that brain scans of active 9- and 10-year-olds revealed larger portions of the brain that control complex thinking. Other studies have shown links between exercise in children and "enhanced neurocognition." The improvements to the brain show that there is a link between exercise and performance in school.

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– Emily Coe



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5 Ways to Get Your Family Moving!

It's not always easy to get motivated to exercise in the wintertime, but there are many ways you can help your kids get the physical activity they need! Check out some fun ideas below.

1. Turn off the TV and have a family game night. Active charades are a fun way to spend your time and get your family off the couch—the more movement, the better!

2. If your child loves to play with the Wii or Xbox, invest in a fitness video game. The more exercise you can encourage at home, the more physical activity will become a normal part of everyday life.

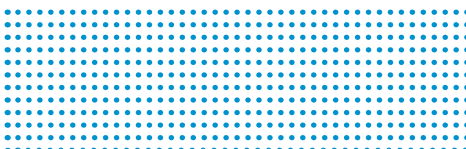


3. Pack up the kids for a winter-friendly exercise field trip! Hit the swimming pool or basketball courts at your local community center, go to a rock climbing gym or take a swing at indoor batting cages. No matter the weather, these activities encourage a healthy blend of exercise and fun.

4. Encourage your kids to join group sports or physical activity. Basketball, soccer, dance

and gymnastics are great ways for your child to work physical activity into a weekly social routine and make good friends along the way.

5. Physical activity doesn't have to be strenuous or time-consuming. Go for a family walk after dinner, skip rope in the backyard or race around the block.



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Why? On the most basic level, exercise helps send more oxygen to the brain, which improves how it functions and helps you think more sharply. According to Dr. John Ratey in his 2008 book *The Spark: The Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and the Brain*, exercise improves learning on three levels:

- 1.** It optimizes your mind-set to improve alertness, attention and motivation.
- 2.** It prepares and encourages nerve cells to bind to one another, which is the cellular basis for logging in new information.
- 3.** It spurs the development of new nerve cells.

Besides the positive impact physical activity has on learning, it provides an outlet for children's emotional well being. "Physical activity can be a great stress management tool for kids as they get older, which will reduce the risk of anxiety and depression," Coe said.