

Make Every Day An Active Day!

By Liz Fleming

How important is it to keep children active?

Very!

In fact, the good habits your kids develop today will play a major role in their future health and well-being.

No kidding!

Not only does physical activity such as skating, swimming, running, jumping and playing catch increase your child's energy and flexibility and build his/her stamina but it also encourages muscle growth and ensures the development of strong healthy bones, hearts and lungs. Weight management and the learning of healthy eating habits are easier for active children and they tend to sleep better too. (Now there's an incentive for almost any parent to get their kids up and moving during the day!)

If your child tends to be nervous in social situations, physical activity – particularly team sports – can work wonders as kids learn to cooperate and contribute to group efforts. Many doctors report that children who are active are not only physically healthier but are also significantly less likely to suffer from depression and anxiety.

Even in the classroom, the active child excels. Physical activity contributes to increased powers of concentration, improved memory and retention and better problem solving skills. These advantages combine to make the physically fit child a happier and more successful student!

Children who have a positive sense of themselves and are able to interact with others without anxiety are less likely to turn to drugs and alcohol as they get older. They don't need help to feel great when they're already on a natural high!

Says Dr. Stafford Dobbin, a local family physician and the dynamic leader of Heart Niagara since 1978, "Keeping children active is the best thing a parent can do for their long-term health...and setting a good example is the first step."

Encourage your children to keep moving all day long by getting yourself up and rolling too. Doing the dishes? Put on some music and dance along while you're at it. Exchange television watching for music appreciation and make sure the tunes are lively. Just hearing upbeat music has the effect of making us want to get moving so crank up the volume and let's rock and roll!

Sorting the laundry? Put the hampers about ten feet from the pile of dirty

clothes and see how many ‘hoops’ you can make. Who knows? Your kids might get to like that job so much they’ll take it over altogether!

Leave the snowblower in the garage and get out the shovels. It will take longer, but the kids can help and you’ll all enjoy a bit of fresh air and exercise. When the leaves fall, rake them into a pile, take turns running and jumping into them and then do the raking all over again. You’ll have so much heart healthy fun, you won’t remember that it’s a chore!

Encourage your family to be more active by adding some new play equipment to your collection. Buy a badminton set for the backyard and have an on-going family tournament, put a basketball hoop in the driveway or buy bocci balls and learn a new sport that’s easy for everyone to play. Maybe this is the year to get into cross-country skiing. It’s far less expensive than the downhill version and every member of the family will get a great workout!

Look for unexpected opportunities to be active. If you have to take a long car trip as a family, be sure to throw the baseball gloves, a football, a soccer ball or even an easy-to-fly kite into the trunk, find a park along the way and blow off some steam. Driving along the lake shore? Stop at a beach and skip stones. See who can get the most skips from one stone. Not only will you get a bit of healthy exercise, but you’ll also give everyone a much needed break from the enforced togetherness of the back seat!

The secret to developing a healthier lifestyle is to make activity a part of your day and your children’s day...every day!