

Becoming More Active

Benefits

- Healthier for children than dieting, as they still need substantial nutrition to grow and develop
- Activity habits are more likely to persist if they start in youth
- The brain releases endorphins (natural pain-killers and mood elevators) with regular aerobic exercise, which may augment treatment of or even prevent some anxieties & depression
- The brain needs oxygen to function optimally, so healthy activity may foster school success

Start with Being a Good Role Model

- Day to day: walk instead of driving to the store; take the stairs instead of the elevator
- Plan enjoyable activities for the family, especially on weekends
- Do activities together with your child (e.g., necessary ones like walking the dog or shoveling the snow as well as sports, playing catch, and other fun ones)
- Share your own love of physical activity (see Helpful Attitudes below)

Plan A Variety of Activities

- Start with what the child is eager to try (he/she is more likely to persist if it's fun)
- Start small: every little bit counts, and you don't want the child to be overwhelmed with activities or sore from doing too much too fast
- Encourage recreational sports, not just competitive ones (most competitive athletics peaks in the 20's; recreational sports can be pursued for a lifetime)
- Plan an aerobic activity 3-4 times per week (may need to work up to this)
- Allow children some unstructured outdoor play time (e.g., local playground or park)
- Encourage and positively reinforce taking lessons in a sport (which may not be fun) and remind the child how much fun it will be once he/she is proficient at it
- Try alternatives to organized sports: hiking, biking, dance, kite-flying, martial arts, Frisbee, rollerblading, road (or driveway) hockey, skateboarding, family swim, home basketball hoop

Helpful Attitudes

- Be positive about the child's participation, rather than criticizing non-participation (i.e., avoid terms like "lazy" or "couch potato" when discussing activity)
- De-emphasize winning and weight loss
- Emphasize improving one's personal skills, having fun, gaining energy/vitality, and the joy of living in the moment as one focuses completely on the game/sport (a great antidote to worry!)
- Consider an activity break a source of refreshment, rather than a chore

Avoid

- Strenuous activity before bed, as it can interfere with sleep
- Hours of television and "screen time" as these are the biggest competitors for activity time (many parents must set a firm daily limit on these)