

Tips For Getting The Family Fit Together

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Every year many of us resolve to be more fit and spend more time with our families only to quickly break one or both resolutions. Why not make 2009 the year you begin keeping these resolutions by combining them?

January is Family Fit Lifestyle Month. It's been more than ten years since Dr. C. Everett Koop, former U.S. Surgeon General, told us we were becoming overweight as a nation. In 1996 Dr. Koop suggested we start battling our expanding waistlines and lack of family time by making physical activity a family affair. Even if we weren't listening then, we must now.

Most families continue to exercise less and more children are overweight. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, GA, one in five children under age 12 is 20% or more over their ideal weight. Start healthful eating habits and physical activity early to prevent school-age kids from becoming overweight. Dr. Koop encourages family activities that can be done together, supporting and rewarding the efforts of each other. Koop also offers the alternative to doing something with your child as a reward for good behavior, instead of an extra helping of dessert or using food to recognize achievements. Koop stated in the introduction to *99 Tips for Family Fitness Fun*, "I encourage you to choose activities you can do together . . . The pleasure of your company is the best reward your child can receive and the best gift you can give."

Variety is the key to making family fitness fun! Exercising to the same DVD or riding the routine bicycle route day after day is not likely to hold an eight year old's attention but a bicycle ride with a scavenger hunt will.

Here are some suggestions to keep your fitness program fun, consistent and safe:

- Warm up – Take a few minutes to stretch before any activity.
- Try something new, maybe a "modern" Wii game or an "old-fashion" activity such as tag or throwing the frisbee.
- Let different family members pick their favorite activity for each week.
- Keep a family fitness calendar.
- Head for the park. Roller skate or play basketball – We have great city and county parks!
- Stick to a schedule. Make regular physical activity part of your family's daily routine.

Teaching your children about healthy eating habits can be a fun family activity as well:

- Let family members share in menu planning for the week.
- Allow children to help prepare meals or snacks.
- Help children fix healthy, creative after school or evening snacks.
- Take trips to a farmer's market together.

In the decade since Dr. C. Everett Koop alerted us about unhealthy lifestyles how are we doing? Family time is more crunched than ever and adult and youth body weights remain high often leading to disastrous outcomes; including higher rates of heart disease and diabetes. There is much work to do; for all of us!

For more ideas take check out *99 Tips for Family Fitness*, found at,
<http://shapeup.org/publications/99.tips.for.family.fitness.fun/>

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