

HELPING YOUR FAMILY BECOME MORE ACTIVE

What can you do when the people you love the most seem stuck in a pattern of sedentary living? Maybe you'd like to be more active, too? It can be tough to stick with a fitness routine when you're the only physically active person in your household. There are ways to help your family build a healthy, active lifestyle.

Start with a Heart-to-Heart

Helping kids become more active is much easier when both adults are on the same page. Sit down with your spouse or partner and share the reasons why you want your family to spend more time moving and less time sitting around, which may include:

- Reduced risk of type 2 diabetes, heart disease, overweight, obesity, and stroke for both kids and parents.
- More energy and endurance to do fun, active things together as a family, such as travelling, hiking, bicycling, or camping.
- Helping your children and teens develop a lifelong habit of physical activity for optimal well-being.
- Fostering good brain health. Studies show that regular exercise optimizes conditions within the brain for learning, concentration, and critical thinking. It's a natural mood elevator and has shown to prevent dementia and other age-related declines of brain function.
- Promoting a positive body image.

Come up with a game plan and cultivate a new family culture of physical activity.

Focus on Fun

When you love somebody, you want the best for him or her, including the best of health. Despite your good intentions, your kids and spouse may or may not be interested or ready to become more physically active. Nagging can push people in the opposite direction.

Why not appeal to their sense of adventure instead and look for fun ways to be active as a family? What about going to the playground, swimming, bowling, canoeing, hiking, or bird-watching? Through these types of experiences, families can learn that being active is much more fun and rewarding than sitting in front of a computer or TV screen.



Encourage Active Play

Adults and children alike benefit from active play and unstructured time for recreation, discovery, and enjoyment. Whether or not you have a yard, keep a simple supply of basic sports equipment on hand, such as balls, mitts, badminton racquets and birdies, hula hoops, and Frisbees®. If you don't have outdoor space to play at home, take your gear to a local park, school, or community center for some old-fashioned family fun.

If your family loves video games, opt for systems that involve physical activity. While this is no substitute for regular vigorous exercise, these interactive games are more beneficial than traditional video games that involve only finger and wrist movements.

Limit Screen Time

More than 2/3 of all American children have television sets in their bedrooms. Average daily screen time for kids ages 8-18 is over the top—

with 4.5 hours of watching TV; 1.5 hours spent in front of the computer; and 1 hour spent playing video games. That comes to almost 7 hours a day spent in front of the screen.

Prolonged screen time has been linked to an increased risk of developing serious medical problems, such as type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and metabolic syndrome, even if exercise is involved. Experts recommend limiting screen time to 2 hours a day or less outside of work or homework; and that applies to grown-ups too.

A Lasting Gift

Set a good example for your family by limiting your own screen time and becoming as active as possible. Parents are powerful role models. Chances are good when your kids see you having fun working out, they'll want to join you.

Helping your family move more and sit less is a powerful act of love. A lifelong habit of physical activity will create healthier and happier families, and may even expand your longevity. What better gift to share with the ones you love?

Additional Resources

[Promoting Youth Physical Activity](#) – Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

[Active Families](#) — Let's Move

[Tips to Reduce Screen Time](#) — National Heart Lung and Blood Institute



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