

BEING ACTIVE WITH OUR KIDS...REALLY!

A healthy, happy child doesn't just drop into our laps. Long-term health depends on many things, but the primary drivers are eating right and being physically active. As moms, we juggle many responsibilities and often think about food and safety the most with our children. Those are important, but activity is necessary too—and you can show them the way by being active with them. By joining in, you're showing them both that activity is important for everyone, and that you love spending time with them—a win-win for any child.

Why Physical Activity is Important

Childhood obesity is a serious crisis in our country and stems from eating and activity choices. Being active is hard-wired into children, so our job as moms is to fuel that instinct whenever we can. The CDC recommends 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity every day for children. Kids have shorter attention spans than most adults, so these 60 minutes likely are not going to happen all at one time. Instead, give kids several opportunities each day to be active—with you.

Ideas for Being Active WITH Your Child

Often Mom's think they need to "take" their children some place to be active, like "going to the gym". That's definitely fun and one way to get them active, but it may not build the lifelong habits they need. They may see it as a treat or an event rather than a way of life. Watching them be active isn't the same as being active with them. For them to build lifelong healthy habits, we need to be right there with them, participating, especially when they're young. While you might be used to sitting on the bench watching them at the park or their soccer game, look at finding ways to be active WITH your child.

Some easy ways to start include:

- A daily walk or bike ride together—schedule it in just like nap time!
- Play with them on the playground (c'mon, release that inner child and swing with them or go down the slide!)
- Play games with a ball – catch, kicking the ball, spud, 4-square
- Gardening. They'll be more likely to try vegetables if they've had a hand in growing them
- Nature hikes
- Swimming. Yep, get in and splash or play with them. The water really is nice once you get used to it!
- Run through the sprinkler
- Jump rope
- Zumba or dance with your child. Any music or radio station will do, or make the Chicken Dance a family favorite and hum the music!

All of these things can be done with your child at home. They can be done spontaneously between errands or organized activities. Consider keeping some basic things like a ball, Frisbee, jump rope and pair of tennis shoes for everyone in the car. You might have 30 minutes between activities and you can do you and your child good.

Use those 30 minutes to find a park or open space and take a walk or play versus driving home and then back again, or sitting with the car running and the TV on.

The Outcomes

Kids love to see their mom letting her hair down, laughing and smiling. It builds a new relationship and memories for them and for you. Your children will become more physically fit without even noticing, because they're having fun. Children who get enough activity each day are typically more fun to be with. Mentally, emotionally and physically they'll be stronger and more resilient—and so will Mom. Research shows families who are active together have stronger bonds and typically better health than those who don't make regular activity a part of their lives.

To show your kids how much fun—and even downright silly—being physically active can be, sign up for the Säjai Foundation's Amazing Walk! on Sept. 29, 2012! It's a 5K with challenges and activities along the way, for all ages. It's the perfect way to kick off a family fitness plan! Visit www.sajaifoundation.org for details and registration.

