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Put a Little Spring in Your Step

By Sheila Gains, Family and Consumer Science Agent, Arapahoe County Extension

As the number of daylight hours starts getting a little longer this Spring, consider making getting outside and moving as a family one of your goals. Why? Physical activity helps control weight, reduce the risk for many diseases including heart disease, type 2 diabetes, stroke and many cancers. Exercise helps strengthen bones and muscles as well as improves mental health of adults and children.

For children and teenagers the recommendation is to get 1 hour of activity per day. For adults the goal is 150 minutes, or 2 ½ hours of physical activity per week.

Source: U.S. Dept. of Health & Human Services, Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans

If you don't have time to add 60 minutes of exercising to your family's day consider breaking up the time into three 20 minute fun activities.

You can do many things to help your children develop healthy exercise habits for life and make physical activity fun for the whole family. Offer a variety of age appropriate activities for children to try. Explain why exercise is so important. Be a good role model.

Tips for Making Family Time Active Time:

- Set an exercise goal (in minutes) for the family. Agree on a prize for reaching your goal such as a family bowling night, trip to the pool or other celebration.
- Start a tradition of celebrating special occasions like holidays and birthdays etc. with a volley ball game, family tug-of-war, foot ball toss, basket ball game, etc.
- If you're having trouble finding time for exercise, schedule exercise time on the family calendar.

Still too busy? Try to work moving more into the things you already need to do. Get creative about adding small amounts of exercise into your family's daily routine for example:

- Do squats and lunges on the side line while you watch your kids or other family members play sports.
- Ask everyone to help unload the groceries. Carry smaller loads and make more trips to the car.
- Take the stairs instead of the elevator. Make taking the stairs an adventure like climbing a mountain or a game of who can get to the top first.
- Park farther away from your destination and walk the rest of the way. Park the car a block or two from school and walk kids the rest of the way.
- Ask children for ideas of fun things they would like to do to be more active.

Springtime Activity Tips:

- Plant a garden.
- If it's too early to plant a garden, plan it, by measuring the space, and going through catalogs to select seeds. Turn garden soil over or get large flower pots ready to go.
- Rake the yard. Give everyone a job, such as holding the trash bag open, raking and inspecting. Keep their interest by switching jobs often.
- Wash the windows and sweep the sidewalk.
- If the weather is nice, walk or bike to locations such as library grocery store, and post office.
- Walk the dog.



If it's raining outside:

- Start a game of "Simon Says" inside
- See how many times you and the kids can tap an inflated balloon before it hits the floor. Or challenge the family to a game of indoor balloon volley ball.
- Get out the old Twister game.
- Turn up the music and dance.

Let's Talk:

When children ask what's going on, why are you making us take the stairs, etc.? Explain that our bodies were made to move. Moving more helps our body and brain work better and feel better.



Activity for Health:

After agreeing on a family goal, hang a chart on the refrigerator to track your success.

We Can! Fit In Daily Physical Activity Chart Examples

Type of Activity	What day of the week	What time of the day	Who will participate	Other notes	Did we do it?
<i>Example 1:</i> Walking the dog	Every day	7 AM and 5 PM	Mom and Sally Dad and John	At least 15–20 minutes!	Yes! Sally and John switched on Wednesday.
<i>Example 2:</i> Frisbee™	Sunday	3 PM	Everyone	River View Park	Yes—we played for 2 hours each Sunday this month.

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