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Family Matters

Improving Health Together

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Newsletter**

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Reconnecting Children with Nature while providing opportunities for physical activity

By Amber Webb, Extension Agent Family & Consumer Sciences, Weld County

“In the last two decades, childhood has moved indoors. The average American child spends as few as 30 minutes in unstructured outdoor play each day. According to the National Wildlife Federation, children generally spend more than seven hours each day in front of an electronic screen.” More families are living in fast-paced, stressful urban environments and schools are offering less time for recess.

Because the daily lives of children are very different than they were a few decades ago, the way kids play, explore and learn about the world around them has changed. This can affect kids’ mental, physical, and emotional health, and how they interact with others. The result? More kids are becoming more obese, depressed and disconnected from nature.

Being a kid in modern times can have its upsides and downsides. Because kids are now growing up in a digital age, they have access to a whole new world of knowledge, communication and learning. This can take their learning farther and faster than previous generations. On the other hand, this new culture of technology of faster computers, access to the internet, online video gaming, and smart devices greatly reduces their time outdoors and engagement with nature.



Why does this matter?

Outdoor playtime and connecting with nature have numerous benefits to children who are growing and developing at a fast pace. It helps to reduce stress, improve mood, better sleep and promotes critical thinking. Nature makes children nicer, enhancing social interactions, value for community, and close relationships. It increases fitness, and builds healthy, active bodies. Playing in the sun raises Vitamin D levels in the body which protects the bones and heart. It can reduce attention disorders. It helps kids be more focused in class and can even help improve test scores. The bottom line: kids need to get outdoors every day!

Tips for Success: What can be done? Help get your kids outdoors!

- Plan fun outdoor activities for your family and for your kids! For Example:
- Try going for a bike ride or walk or as a family. Skip, jump, race and cartwheel with the kids!
- Go on a family picnic and play a game in the park together.
- Take your kids to a local park you haven’t been to yet.
- Create an outdoor treasure hunt for kids to find something in nature (leaves, birds, bugs, rocks, fish in a pond).
- Have kids take pictures of nature from their perspective.

Helping families increase physical activity and enjoy healthy foods ...

Let's Talk

Engaging with nature doesn't have to be a major activity far from home (like visiting a national or state park). Kids can gain a sense of wonder right in their own backyard, neighborhood or local natural area or park.



Let your kids know that playing outdoors helps their body grow strong and healthy. Playing outdoors also helps them to be happy and think clearer in school and sleep better at night. Aim for 60 minutes a day outdoors.

Set a good example and limit your own screen time. When kids have positive experiences in nature, they will readily want more! For more ideas to get your kids outdoors and engaged with nature, visit the National Wildlife Federation at www.nfw.com. Check out a few of their nature apps (for smart phones) that you can use on the go!

Recipe for Health

After spending time outdoors, it's important for kids to refuel with a healthy snack! Have the kids help make a smoothie, and if possible, let them choose a few of the ingredients to use.

Peanut butter and Fruit Smoothie

Makes 2 servings

Ingredients:

- 1/2 cup plain yogurt
- 1 cup milk (or other non-dairy alternative)
- 2 tablespoons creamy peanut butter or almond butter, if you prefer (* If you're allergic to nuts, substitute 1/4 cup toasted wheat germ, oats, or sunflower seeds for the peanut butter.)
- 1 cup fresh or frozen strawberries (or other frozen berries, bananas, or peaches)
- 1 tablespoons honey to sweeten (optional)

Instructions:

1. Wash your hands with soap and water.
2. Gather all your equipment and ingredients and put them on a counter.
3. Put all the ingredients in the blender.
4. Put the top on tightly. Turn the blender to a medium setting. Blend until the mixture is smooth, about 1 minute.
5. Serve right away — or store in a thermos or covered in the refrigerator, up to 4 hours.

Recipe adapted from Chop Chop Family www.chopchopfamily.org

Sources: *Whole Child: Developing Mind, Body, and Spirit Through Outdoor Play* written by the National Wildlife Federation. <https://www.nwf.org/>

