

TIPS FOR PARENTS: Keep Your Children Active and Healthy During the Summer

While summer is potentially full of fun outdoor activities, young people can often spend hours inside and inactive, with video games, television, or friends. Encouraging physical activities and good nutrition during the summer can help our children enjoy their summer while staying on track in their physical, social, emotional, cognitive, and verbal development. Kids who keep up over the summer are more successful learners from their earliest years, and they are more likely to read at grade level by the end of third grade. Here are some ideas for incorporating fun activities and nutrition into the summer.

- **Look for summer opportunities in your community that promote learning, physical activity, and healthy eating.** Ask specific questions about the learning and physical activities, as well as food available throughout the day for your child. Many summer learning programs provide summer meals through the federal USDA Summer Food Service Program. Ask your child's teacher or school for recommended summer activities that incorporate health with learning.
- **Encourage your child to get outside and play.** Ride a bike, join a pick-up sports game, or walk to your local library. Make sure that your child drinks plenty of water while out in the heat to stay hydrated.
- **Be active with your child.** Take a walk together, create a scavenger hunt in the community, or go to a local basketball court and shoot some hoops. Whatever activity you choose, it's great to exercise and spend time together.
- **Take advantage of local pools and recreation centers.** Many communities have free or low-cost youth activities or programs at facilities such as pools, playgrounds, parks, sporting fields, and community centers. Ask your child's teacher or contact your local government to obtain more information on what's available for your child during the summer.
- **Make reading a priority.** Ask your child's teacher or school librarian for a summer reading list. Join a reading program or group at your local library. Take a book to the pool. Set aside a specific time to read together.
- **Keep healthy snacks around the house.** Freeze some grapes or place a popsicle stick in the middle of a yogurt cup and make a frozen treat. String cheese and fresh fruit smoothies are also great snack options. Popcorn with cinnamon instead of butter and salt also makes a fun and healthy snack.
- **Turn off the TV and the computer.** According to a recent study by the YMCA of the USA, 50 percent of parents surveyed said technological distractions, such as cell phones and television, are a big barrier to getting their kids to engage in healthy behaviors. Encourage kids to turn off the gadgets and get engaged with friends and family.
- **Give kids toys that encourage activity.** Toys like basketballs, soccer balls, jump ropes, or kites encourage children to be active. Outdoor games that the family can play together, such as volleyball, Frisbee, or badminton, are a great way to get everyone moving and having fun.



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