

5 Simple, Fun Ideas for Family Fitness

1. Make Time to Play

Set aside 30 minutes three times a week to do fun exercises with your kids. Make it a part of your after-school or after-dinner routine. If your kids are young, they might enjoy hopscotch or hide-and-seek. Kick a soccer ball around with older children. Also plan at least one family activity every weekend. It can be as simple as taking little ones to the playground -- or as challenging as an all-day hike with your teenager. A key to getting kids moving is planning time for physical activities. You can find that time by turning off the TV, for starters -- and keeping TVs out of the kids' bedrooms. Then offer a variety of family activities, both competitive and noncompetitive. Exploring different ways to move their bodies will help children find exercises they enjoy and want to stick with for the long run.

2. Walk or Bicycle Everywhere You Can

Use muscle power: Bike or walk to the grocery store, library, or to your child's school or sports events. Go for a 30-minute family walk after dinner instead of heading right for the television. Track everyone's mileage or steps with a pedometer, and try to add more distance every week. Use a family exercise log or colorful stickers to track your progress. Put your log or chart on the refrigerator as a reminder to keep up the good effort together.

3. Plan Active Family Gatherings

Serve up family fitness as well as cake at your child's birthday party by planning active games such as tag or relay races. Older kids might enjoy throwing a dance party. Any large gathering of kids is also a great opportunity to play a team sport, just head to a nearby soccer field or basketball court. Other active party ideas: a pool party, in-line or ice skating, or climbing at an indoor rock gym. At family or holiday gatherings, turn off the TV and take a walk around the neighborhood or go for a short hike at a local park. Or get everyone outside for a game of catch or shooting hoops.

4. Sing and Dance While You Clean

Set aside time for household chores and do them together as a family. Play music as you clean, and take turns choosing favorite songs. Younger children love to help out and can pick up toys or sweep floors while dancing with the broom. Older kids can dust, vacuum, and help make beds.

5. Make Yard Work Less of a Chore for More Family Exercise

Enjoy seasonal yard work together. Younger children can help plant and tend a garden. Older kids can rake leaves into a pile -- and then jump in it. Make snow shoveling fun for all by building a snow fort or creating a family of snow people.