

# Family Fitness: Making it Work For Everyone

Let's face it; it's hard for us to get that workout in sometimes. It's especially hard if you're a parent busy with work and kids. A recent study by the University of Pittsburg found that while marriage had only a small effect upon one's ability to exercise, parenthood had a profoundly negative effect upon parents exercise opportunities.

And what about the kids? Do they exercise? Chances are, unless they're in a sports program that requires some kind of regular (four to five times per week) and sustained (45 to 60 minutes) physical exertion, they're not getting enough exercise either. Schools are trying to do their part but with budget and school day schedule restrictions Phys Ed teachers are fighting an uphill battle. We hear the statistics all the time like a distant drum beat: 11 million kids overweight and 13 million at risk of being overweight (AHA), Childhood diabetes rates rising, TV watching going up and outdoor activities going down.

The implications for us as parents and for our kids are that unless we take control ourselves it's unlikely this scenario will improve. So what do we do? First of all it's a good idea to remind ourselves of the benefits of regular exercise. Not so much for us, we get it, but for our children. Exercise is essential for their development. It helps with their self esteem, it's healthy and helps them stay within normal weight ranges, it develops good habits that will last a lifetime, it facilitates social skills, and it's even been shown to help with grades. These are all compelling reasons to do something about our "family health." The challenge is how.

First and foremost we need to ask the question, "What works best for our family?" Fitting exercise into your family's life is unique to you. Should we exercise together? Alongside one another? At home? Outside? At a club? Do we make it "formal" exercise (running/strength training/exercise classes), exercise in the form of play (backyard Frisbee games/chase/pirate island) or both? This last question will be determined to some extent by the age of your children. Next, assess your options by looking at the resources available to you for this family fitness time.

In the past decade many more options have come online to help with this goal. According to The International Health & Racquet Sportsclub Association (IHRSA), children are the second fastest growing market for health clubs after baby boomers. Consequently the amount of children's programming available through clubs has risen dramatically. Check your local club to see if they offer children's programs. Better yet, see if they offer family fitness programs. Some smaller clubs do offer these types of programs.

If you choose to try and work your family fitness in at home, consider making it fun and interactive. This is great together time for families and a wonderful opportunity to lead by example and model healthy behavior to your children. There are resources available to help create a home program. On the Web you can find a wealth of information through sites such as [www.actionforhealthykids.org](http://www.actionforhealthykids.org), or [www.shapeup.org/publications/99.tips.for.family.fitness.fun/](http://www.shapeup.org/publications/99.tips.for.family.fitness.fun/). Whichever route you choose the key to long term success is making this a regular and consistent part of your family routine. It should involve all the basic components of exercise: aerobic, strength, flexibility and, most of all, fun.