

A Publication for

LISHA KILL &
SAND CREEK

MIDDLE
SCHOOL
PARENTS

CLASSROOM



Summertime and the living is... **active!**

For on-the-go kids and their families, summertime can offer a well-deserved break. Yet, just because the pace of life slows during the summer months doesn't mean that physical activity should, too. In fact, summer's warmer temperatures and longer hours of daylight make it a perfect time to be physically active and let loose at the same time.

DEVELOPING ACTIVE HABITS THAT CAN LAST A LIFETIME

Among teens and children age six and older, more than 15 percent are overweight. This is more than three times the number of young people who were overweight in the 1970s. Researchers cite diets high in fat and sugar and a lack of regular physical activity as the two main contributors in this childhood trend.

Like adults, overweight children are at risk for serious health conditions such as type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol and sleep disorders.

Overweight children may also be prone to low self-esteem that stems from being teased, bullied or rejected by peers. Children who are unhappy with their weight may be more likely than average-weight children to develop unhealthy dieting habits and eating disorders, such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia. According to the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP), they may also be more prone to depression, anxiety and substance abuse.

Making sure your children take part in physical activities each day is one positive way to stem this growing trend. However, the benefits of an active and healthy lifestyle go beyond keeping weight at healthy levels. Regular physical activity can also:

- **Strengthen muscles and bones;**
- **Strengthen the heart and lungs** (particularly true of aerobic exercise—the kind that makes you sweat and brings in lots of oxygen, such as brisk walking or jogging, swimming or in-line skating);
- **Help even out pre-adolescent mood swings** as it releases natural endorphins, the body's "feel good" chemicals; and
- **Increase balance and flexibility**, making preteen bodies more graceful despite growth spurts.

ACTIVE AND HEALTHY LIFESTYLE

■ **Make fitness a family affair.**

Children and teens whose parents are physically active are much more likely to develop healthy attitudes toward being active themselves. If appealing, take a hike or family bike ride together. Not into the same type of sport or activity? When exercising at the same venue such as a local park or YMCA, you can all get fit while participating in your own favorite activities. This can also give young teens a sense of independence that comes from doing their own thing in a safe and supervised setting.

■ **Support their interests/respect their differences.** During the preteen years, children's interests tend to mature and change — no longer content with the playground, they may now want to pump iron, cheerlead or skateboard. Summer camps and recreation programs offer many opportunities for kids to try a new sport or physical activity. At <http://www.summeroncampus.com/main/ActivityList.asp>, you'll find lots of active summer camp options. Summer activity announcements published in local newspapers or sent home with your child from school are also good resources for active fun.



Physical education classes two or three times a week at school is only a portion of what youngsters need. Children and teens should be encouraged to be active outside of school every day. The National Academies' Institute of Medicine recommends that children and adults participate in at least one hour of moderate to vigorous exercise daily (e.g., brisk walking, dancing, tennis and other racquet sports, soccer, basketball, touch football). This can be done in several sessions, and through a variety of activities, each day.

Encourage your children to choose a few they'd like to try and schedule them on the family calendar. Kids who aren't into organized sports and activities can still maintain an active life. Running, biking, yoga and martial arts are just a few activities that can be done alone or with a friend and are wonderful ways to stay fit.

■ **Serve a variety of healthy foods** — including lots of fresh veggies and fruit that abound in the summer months and eat meals together as often as possible. Stock up on healthy snacks and drinks to fuel your kids while they are home this summer or off at camp.

■ **Encourage them to help around the house.** Enlist your children in

planning, shopping for and preparing family meals. They'll learn a lot about good nutrition when researching recipes and reading nutrition labels on foods. Activities such as lawn mowing, gardening and vacuuming are physical activities that also teach important life skills and encourage kids to contribute to the family in positive ways.

■ **Limit screen time** — the total amount of time your kids spend watching TV, DVDs and videos, playing handheld computer games, and using the computer to no more than two hours a day, combined. Less screen time means more time to be active (see back page story).

HELPING YOUR MIDDLE SCHOOLERS DEAL WITH THE STRESS OF EXAMS

With tests and the end of the school year approaching, many children can experience some stress. As parents, it is important to monitor that stress level in our children and understand that everyone handles stress differently. **Some of the top sources of stress for children include:**

At School

- Being away from home
- Worry over making friends and getting along with peers
- Worry about school work and school success
- Fear of being different from others

Symptoms of stress include:

- **Physical** — headaches, stomach aches, vomiting, wetting, frequent trips to the school nurse
- **Emotional** — fear, irritability, sadness
- **Behavior** — crying, nervous tics, losing one's temper
- **Interactions with others** — withdrawing, teasing, bullying, extreme shyness

Here are some ideas to help children who may be experiencing stress:

- Help your children to talk about what is bothering them
- Encourage vigorous physical activities
- Find a special one-on-one time
- Encourage healthy eating
- Reinforce relaxation skills (counting to 10, deep breathes, remind yourself to stay calm)
- Give back rubs and hugs
- Let your child know that mistakes are OK
- Be clear about rules and consequences - children feel safe when they know where the limits are
- Teach and model ways to handle difficult situations. For example, if your child expressed feeling bad about being teased, practice handling the situation.
- Tell stories about dealing with stress. South Colonie's school libraries and the public library may have a book that discusses your child's area of stress.
- If you have questions, contact your family doctor or your school nurse. They're here to help!

Developing Healthier Lifestyles for Your Child

How? Begin by Turning Off the TV



According to experts, childhood obesity had become an epidemic in the United States today. Why? Too many children aren't active enough and eat too much of the wrong foods.

Children who watch a lot of television tend to snack more and on foods that aren't as healthy - potato chips, candy, etc. TV ads encourage food choices that are usually high in fat, sugar and salt making them hard to resist.

With the summer approaching you, as a parent, can take action to make television less of an influence in your own household. Use these tips taken from TV-Turn off Network, as a guide to getting your family on the right track to less TV.

TV Turn Off Tips

- Keep the TV set out of your child's bedroom
- Be active as a family by taking walks, riding bikes or learning a sport
- Move your television to a less prominent location
- Do not use television as a reward
- Hide the remote or block out undesired channels
- Designate certain days of the week as TV free days
- Don't worry if children say they are bored. Boredom passes and often leads to creativity.

For the Love of Reading



What's the best way to create a lifelong reader? It's free, it's fun and it will bring you and your child closer.

Answer: Reading together.

Find a time each day when you and your middle schooler can get cozy and enjoy a good book. Here are three tips to help you choose stories:

1. Ask librarians, friends and teachers for recommendations. Tip: If your child doesn't already have a library card, sign her up.
2. Find books that expand your youngster's interests (animals, outer space), deal with an event (a new baby, a visit to the dentist), and build character (friendship, truthfulness).
3. Pick stories for both information and enjoyment. Try real and make believe stories, poems and children's magazines.

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