

Monthly Fun Family Activity Challenges

Want to feel more productive, energetic and happy? Looking for ways to connect as a family? Then physical activity might be your answer. If you're not sure how to get started or you're just looking for new ideas, then this resource is for you.

Explore the suggested monthly activities and challenge your family to complete a year's worth of monthly physical activities. At year end, after you have completed all the monthly challenges, feel free to start again or come up with your own. You may also want to refer to the activity challenges document for more ideas. Your family will be well on their way to establishing physical activity as a part of their daily routine.

Getting Started – Physical Activity Basics

Being physically active is important for overall health in both children and adults. It can help you lower risks for coronary heart disease, hypertension, type 2 diabetes mellitus, obesity, fatigue, some forms of cancer and a variety of other chronic diseases. Research also has shown an association of fitness levels with academic performance – the healthier the kids, the better they tend to do academically.

Important recommendations to help you add physical activity to your daily routine:

- Incorporate a variety of aerobic, muscular strength, endurance and flexibility activities/exercises.
- Children and adolescents need at least 60 minutes of physical activity each day.

Note: 60 minutes can be broken up into increments of 10 minutes throughout the day as long as it accumulates to 60 minutes. This should include a combination of moderate-intensity aerobic activities such as brisk walking and vigorous-intensity activity such as running. Activities that increase the heart rate, making conversations difficult while moving, are considered to be moderate to vigorous physical activities.

- Establish regular physical activity into your schedule so that it becomes routine, just like brushing your teeth. This will cause your children to always include physical activity into their schedules – a healthy habit that needs to be incorporated for a lifetime.
- All individuals can find some form of physical activity they can enjoy. Work to expose your children to new physical activities so they can identify activities they enjoy.
- All activity counts toward the 60 minutes, including household tasks such as washing the car, gardening, raking leaves, mowing and vacuuming.
- Keep safe by checking out the environment, equipment and space before you begin. Annual physicals are always recommended.
- Being a good role model. Staying active alongside your child will make them want to participate with you and better their health. Active families tend to have more children that are active as adults.

Note: The physical activity recommendation for adults is 150 minutes of moderately intense aerobic activity each week. For more information regarding physical activity guidelines visit www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/everyone/guidelines/index.html.

Ready to get started! Find the month you are in and start from there!

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January: New Year's Resolutions

- Every January, millions of people make resolutions to change their lives for the better. This year, we challenge your family to develop family and individual goals towards a healthier lifestyle. As you develop goals make sure they are “SMART”: Specific, Measureable, Attainable, Realistic and Timely. Omitting one of these characteristics can make a goal impossible to reach. Your goals should not focus on the product or performance but rather on the process or behavior. For example, a process goal would be to increase the total number of days (make sure to be specific) per week you are physically active.+ An example of a product or performance goal would be to run a mile in ten minutes which could take a long time to achieve and thus, you may become discouraged and/or lose interest. Focus on the process or behavior first.
- Once each family member has decided on a goal, help each other develop plans to achieve them. Throughout the year, share stories about your progress (successes/failures) and encourage your family members to stick to their healthier lifestyle goals.
- Post and decorate your goals where all family members can see them. When you achieve a goal individually or as a family, celebrate it. Take pictures to remember your accomplishments and journey.

February: Healthy Heart Challenge

- Have one or more family members draw a heart and divide the heart into half. Label each side of the heart with “Heart-Healthy Activities” and “Heart-Healthy Foods.” When your family completes a heart-healthy activity and/or eats a heart-healthy food, draw and/or write it down in the designated section of your heart. Try to fill up your heart with as many different heart-healthy activities and foods that you can. Feel free to decorate your heart as you go. Hang your heart on your refrigerator as a reminder to maintain a heart-healthy lifestyle.

For more specific information on heart-healthy activities and foods refer to

- www.MyPyramid.gov
- www.FDA.gov
- www.AmericanHeart.org

March: Bunny Hop Challenge

- This spring, have your family “hop” into fitness by creating your own “EGGcellent Fitness Hunt.”
- To complete this activity you will need 15-30 plastic eggs, paper, a writing utensil, and a basket to hold the “fit” eggs.
- Instead of filling these eggs with candy, you are going to fill each egg with a fitness and/or fun physical activity challenge.
- Work together as a family to write down your favorite physical activities. Cut each activity up into strips of paper. Fill each egg with one or more of your chosen activities. Each day, pick one or two eggs and complete the activity challenge together. Be creative and have fun on your “hunt” to becoming fit.

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April: Plant a Garden

- Looking for a fun way to spend time with your kids outside? Try planting and planning a family garden. Whether you choose to grow fruits or vegetables, your children will love this activity. Not only is this a fun and easy way to be active, but you can also use this opportunity to teach the kids about new and healthy fruits and vegetables. Your children will love to try the food they grow. This activity not only allows you to spend some quality family time together, but being active and eating healthy can impact your children's self-esteem and overall health.

Helpful Tips:

- If you don't have the space or resources to start a whole garden, start with a potted plant, herbs and/ or buy one from the store and watch it grow.
- The last Friday of April is Arbor Day. In honor of Arbor Day, your family can plant a tree.
- Saplings can be bought at local orchards or garden centers. Sometimes programs give free saplings away near Arbor Day. You can make a day out of it by finding a local event where numerous trees are planted.

May: Family Activity Contract & Cinco De Mayo Family Dance Party

In May you may pick one or both challenges to try!

Option 1: Family Activity Contract

- Create a family activity contract to establish healthy living goals. Remember to make sure you goals are SMART (see January). Encourage all members to come up with different physical activities and healthy eating behaviors to be included on your contract. Challenge all your family members by having them sign the document agreeing to the challenge. Hang it where all family members can be reminded on a daily basis.

Other Suggestions:

- Have fun and decorate your summer contract. When the summer ends, create a new contract for the fall.

Option 2: Cinco De Mayo

- Get your family and friends together for a Cinco de Mayo Dance Party. Find music that celebrates Cinco de Mayo. Play the music and dance from the beginning to end. If you're not comfortable dancing, have the kids come up with the routines and teach the adults so that everyone gets up and moves. It doesn't have to be all at once, accumulating at least 60 minutes throughout the day will help you gain the benefits.

Other Suggestions:

- If you are hosting the dance party, challenge yourself to prepare healthier foods to help celebrate.

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June: Summer Solstice

June is the month of the Summer Solstice, which is the longest day of the year. Because June has the most hours of daylight, it gives you more time to spend on outside activities. See below for outdoor activity suggestions.

- The first week of June, track how much time your family spends doing ‘screen time’ (TV/computer/videogames). Set goals on decreasing screen time. For your children, work on cutting screen time to less than two hours per day.

Not sure what outdoor activities you could get involved in? Try these:

- **Car Wash Challenge:** Instead of taking your car to the car wash, wash it together as a family at home. Any physical activity counts.
- **Sports Challenge:** Go outside or walk to a local park with your family and play a favorite sport such as football, basketball, or soccer. Before or after the game, you can play other sports related games to develop your skills. For example, if you played football, run routes with your family and see how many total catches your family can make or try a game of keep-a-way to work on skills, but most importantly keep the focus on activity and having fun.
- **Water Fun:** Find a local swimming pool, water park or lake and have some fun swimming together.
- **Jump Rope:** Have fun jumping rope together as a family, jump ropes are fairly inexpensive and jumping rope is a great aerobic activity. Or, pick up a hula hoop and while one family member jumps the others can hula hoop.
- **Walk and Bike:** Create a walking or biking route the whole family can do together.

July: Explore New Activities

- Each member of the family comes up with a new activity. Put all the new activities on a list. As a family, try each new activity at least once. You are bound to find a few that will be family favorites. Here are some activity ideas to get you thinking:
 - Swimming is a fun summer activity. Swim relays in the pool and/or time family members to see how fast they can swim the distance of the pool.
 - Play “Marco Polo” or freeze tag if you have a larger group.
 - Use sprinklers to cool kids off in the summer.
 - Have kids run from one side of the yard to the other avoiding sprinklers and trying to stay dry. See how long that lasts.
 - Play green light, yellow light, red light or duck, duck, goose under the sprinklers.
 - Provide your children sponges or anything that squirts, and let them have fun staying cool.
 - Ride a bike or go for a walk.
 - Play catch with a ball.

August: Visit a Park

- Find a map of the area where you live. Plan a family outing to visit at least one of the local parks and consider having a picnic. Check out everything the park has to offer before you go, including equipment, trails, and special stops. Have fun exploring the new park and don’t forget the sunscreen and plenty of water.

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September: Stair Challenge and Labor Day Celebration Challenge

- Challenge your family to take the stairs rather than elevators or escalators. This is a great way to add in a few extra steps a day.
- Labor Day signifies the end of summer, so find a community pool, lake, or beach to enjoy the last chance to swim outdoors for the year. Can't find water, then plan a fun backyard family barbeque filled with healthy foods and family games such as horseshoes, croquette, badminton, baseball or volleyball.

October: Rocktober National Arts and Humanities Month

- October is National Arts and Humanities Month as well as Healthy Lung Month.
- Find local art galleries, museums and outdoor concerts. If it is safe, consider walking, jogging or biking to them. If not, walking through art galleries and museums is a great way to add activity to your day.
- Architecture is also art; so find a walking, biking or jogging route that takes you by beautiful and historic buildings, memorials or bridges.
- To celebrate healthy lung month, try enrolling in a dance class. Dancing is fun and good for your body. Do it as a family and see who has the best moves. If you can't find a dance class, participate in other aerobic activities to celebrate healthy lung month. Use this opportunity to remind your children of the dangers of smoking.

November: Turkey Trot Challenge

- Challenge your family to a "Turkey Trot" or other physical activity during the holiday weekend. The increased amount of calories consumed on Thanksgiving can serve as fuel for activity. After the football games are over and the food is off the table, enjoy some family time by taking a walk around the block or playing a game like football at a park or in the yard.
- Remember participating in physical activity is not only healthy, but can be an energy boost for the long holiday weekend.

December: Winter Break Challenge

- The holidays are a time of family togetherness, so challenge your family to "12 Days of Fitness" during the winter break.
- Have each family member come up with one (or more) favorite fitness activities. On the first day of the break, begin with one repetition of one exercise (one lap around a park) and as the days increase, add a new exercise (galloping two city blocks on day 2, three push-ups on day 3, etc.) in addition to the previous ones. On the last day of the activity, your family should be performing a workout with 12 different fun activities, each with a different number of repetitions.