

## HELPFUL TIPS FOR KEEPING KIDS FIT

1. **Be a role model.** Your children watch and mimic your habits, good and bad. If your kids see you being physically active and having fun, they're more likely to be active and stay active throughout their lives.
2. **Use exercise as transportation.** Walk your kids to school, bike to visit friends or roller skate to the park. You also can park at the far end of parking lots and take the stairs instead of the elevator.
3. **Involve the whole family.** Invite everyone to participate in activities. "It's one of the most successful ways to change your kid's exercise habits," Harrison says. You can volunteer to coach a soccer team and encourage your kids to play, sign-up for a martial arts class as a family, join an outdoor adventure, swimming or running club, or take a ball or flying disk when your family goes to the park or beach.
4. **Focus on fun.** Kids like to have fun, so they're more likely to keep exercising if they're doing an activity they enjoy. Turn on music and have a dance party, or pack in lots of walking during trips to the zoo, park or miniature-golf course.
5. **Make activity social.** Invite your kids' friends to join the activity. "The number one reason people stick with exercise is they're engaged and accountable," Harrison says. And, they'll probably have more fun.
6. **Use competition as a motivator.** Make it a contest between you and the kids to see who can run faster, or do more push-ups or jumping jacks. Give the winner a prize. And, use technology such as a pedometer to track your results and progress.
7. **Include kids in household activities.** Many household chores, like washing the dog or the car, or mowing the lawn, are great opportunities to sneak in a little physical activity.
8. **Give gifts that promote physical activity.** Rollerblades, bicycles, ice skates, soccer balls and even active-play video games make great gifts that promote physical activity. Activity-tracking apps and technologies also are fun choices for kids.
9. **Limit TV and computer time.** Offer them active options, like joining a local recreation center or after-school program, or taking lessons in a sport they enjoy. When your family watches TV together, get everyone moving during commercial breaks – do jumping jacks, use a hula hoop or even jump rope.
10. **Plan vacations with new ways to exercise.** Plan your family vacation around an activity or two. Think hiking, off-road cycling, kayaking, camping or snorkeling. You'll get to explore new places and teach your kids to appreciate nature. Plus, the activities you try on vacation might even become the hobbies your family enjoys for years to come.

## **Active kids may be smarter kids**

Regular exercise may do more than help your kids stay lean and fight off diseases. Some research suggests kids who are physically fit do better in school than ones who are less fit.

“Physical activity helps kids develop mental clarity, feel less stressed and provides an outlet for their energy,” Harrison says.

“Just remember, all kids aren’t created equal,” Harrison adds. “Kids with better motor skills tend to be more active and some kids are genetically inclined to be overweight.” And, you should guide – not force – your kids to increase their activity level.

So, choose physical activities your kids will enjoy, stay positive and get moving.

Carol Harrison, a senior exercise physiologist at MD Anderson.