

Start of the New Year with a Spring in your Step!

Article submitted by Susan Hippchen, RD, MCPS Food and Nutrition Services (Susan_Hippchen@mcpsmd.org) and Tracy Fox, MPH, RD, Health Committee Chair, MCCPTA (tracyfox@comcast.net)

Start of 2007 with a family goal for physical activity. Develop a physical activity plan and reduce sedentary activities to promote health, physiological wellbeing, and a healthy body weight. Make sure to include aerobic exercise into your physical activity plan. This form of exercise conditions the heart and lungs by increasing the oxygen available to the body and by allowing the heart to use oxygen more efficiently. Aerobic exercise also tones muscle, eliminates body fat, relieves stress, improves stamina and overall energy, aids in establishing regular sleep patterns, and lowers LDL (“bad”) cholesterol while increasing HDL (“good”) cholesterol. To get the most health benefits from aerobic exercise, leading health organizations recommend 30 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity for adults and 60 minutes for children and adolescences most days of the week, preferably daily.

As a parent, you have a very important role in shaping your children’s physical activity behaviors and attitudes. Here are a few tips to help you encourage your children to become more physically active.

- Be a role model and lead an active lifestyle yourself, and make physical activity a part of your family’s daily routine. For example, designate time for family walks or playing active games together.
- Encourage your children to express interest in new activities and offer positive reinforcement for participation.
- Make physical activity fun! The activities can be structured or non-structured. They may range from organized team sports, individual sports to recreational activities such as walking, skating, running, skiing, bicycling, dancing, swimming, playground activity and free play time.
- Safety is a priority so make sure protective equipment such as helmets, knee pads, and wrist pads, etc. are used.
- Limit the time you and your children engage in sedentary activities such as watching TV, talking on the phone, using the computer, and playing video games. Instead, find fun activities to do as a family that involve more activity.
- For older kids, invite them to the gym – look at membership options for teens.
- Encourage teens to get together with friends for flag football, soccer, or other impromptu activities.
- Find out what your kids are doing in physical education class.

Interested in learning more about how you can take action to promote Physical Education in schools? Check out the Maryland Healthy Schools Coalition web site at: <http://www.mdhealthyschools.org/>

Interested in helping organize a “Girls on the Run” (GOTR) after school running program for girls? Check out the web site: www.girlsontherun.com and contact MCPS parent Eve Mills, Executive Director of GOTR – Montgomery County, at (301) 229-2514 or southboundmills@comcast.net.

May the year be a happy, healthy and physically active one for you and your family!