

Helping our Children Build Healthy and Strong Hearts

Teaching our children about leading an active and healthy lifestyle is the first step in fighting what has become an obesity epidemic throughout America. Health in general, more especially heart-centric health related activities, are paramount for children. Moreover, giving them a strong knowledge base about their bodies and the ill effects of leading a poor lifestyle, or even better, the positive effects of leading an active and healthy lifestyle, is extremely important in deterring them from developing the same obesity and disease epidemics our society is currently plagued with. Studies now show that permanent changes in body composition and negative heart and end organ damage issues can settle in as early as the age of two. So, it is never too early to start stressing the importance of exercise and health-centric living to children. Use the tips below to help educate your family, friends, and the children of our great nation about how important maintaining a healthy heart is, regardless of your age.

- Set a good example yourself. Practice heart-healthy habits and teach your children the proper way to eat, exercise, and ultimately lead a healthy lifestyle.
- Limit television, movies, videos and computer games to less than two hours a day. Substitute the rest of leisure time with physical activity.
- Plan family activities and vacations that involve vigorous activities such as hiking, bicycling, skiing, swimming, etc.
- Give your children some household chores that require physical exertion, keeping in mind their levels of strength, coordination and maturity. Yard work, scrubbing floors and taking out the garbage not only teach responsibility but can be good exercise.
- Observe sports and activities your children like, then find out about lessons and clubs. Some children thrive on team sports; others prefer individual activities. Some activities, like tennis and swimming, can be enjoyed for a lifetime and are much easier to learn during childhood.
- If it's safe to walk or bike rather than drive, do so. Use stairs instead of elevators and escalators. Increase the distances you and your children walk.
- Stay involved in your child's physical education classes at school. At daycare, make sure the kids exercise at least 20 minutes a day. Ask about frequency of classes and activity, class size, curriculum (instruction in lifetime fitness activities as well as team sports should be emphasized), physical fitness assessments, qualifications of the teacher (should hold appropriate certification in physical education and be an appropriate role model for students). Physical fitness should be measured at the beginning and end of each year, and goals should be established for each child. Encourage your school board to emphasize skills students can use for the rest of their lives.
- Discourage homework immediately after school to let children find some diversion from the structure of the school day. Kids should be active after school and before dinner.
- Choose fitness-oriented gifts -- a jump rope, mini-trampoline, tennis racket, baseball bat, OR a summer camp membership at the Buckeye Recreation Center. Select the gift with your child's skills and interests in mind.
- Take advantage of our recreation opportunities -- from summer camps, sports camps, indoor and outdoor recreation opportunities, to the A Cool 5 race weekend. Check out the upcoming Spring and Summer Program Guide for various camp offerings, and various outdoor group activities such as camping, hiking adventures and health seminars.
- Free your infant from mechanical restraints as much as possible. Strollers and playpens are high on convenience but low on activity. Try to unleash your diapered dynamo whenever and wherever he or she can safely move around.
- When your children are bored, suggest something that gets them moving, like playing catch or building a snowman in the yard.
- Lastly, always remember with children to keep things fun and enjoyable for everyone!