



## In This Issue

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## Family Matters for Health

The definition of “the family” these days extends well beyond what traditionally was described as the “nuclear family.” But here’s something that remains true about families: When it comes to your health, your family matters. Much of what you do as a family – from eating meals to setting household rules to choosing recreation activities – has an impact on your physical and emotional health. These articles have healthy suggestions for you and your family.

## Family Fitness

In past years, generations of school children have impatiently anticipated outdoor recess and after school fun. But today, nature, with all her adventures, must compete with television, video games and the Internet for our children's attention. This change in childhood activities is affecting our nation's health. Just look at these statistics:

- 50% of adults and nearly 25% of children are overweight.
- Between 50% and 70% of overweight children will grow up to become overweight adults.
- Obesity is now considered nearly as serious a threat to Americans' health as smoking.
- Severe obesity among children has almost doubled in the past 20 years.
- Only 30% of childhood obesity comes from overeating, while 50% is due to lack of exercise.
- 66% of school-age children don't meet recommended minimum standards for aerobic fitness, muscular strength and endurance.

Clearly it's time to find ways for parents to counter our kids' sedentary lifestyles. Here are some ways to give your child a healthy dose of physical activity.

## **EXERCISE TOGETHER**

Successfully improving a child's exercise habits usually means the whole family must make changes together. Scheduling family fun time on weekends, after work, or after school is an ideal opportunity for injecting regular doses of physical activity into children's lives. Basketball and Frisbee can take the place of board games and movies, and choosing something the kids like, even if it isn't necessarily a parental favorite, keeps their interest level high.

## **MAKE EXERCISE FUN**

Regular exercise will become a healthy habit only when it's fun as well as rewarding. Don't get in the way of your child's enjoyment by insisting he or she performs up to a certain standard. Children will ask for instruction when they want to know how to do something better, and they'll let you know just how much coaching they want. Focus on having fun and don't let parental lectures or pressures become a deterrent.

## **ORGANIZE SPORTS PARTIES**

Invite your children's friends to join the fun. Organize get-togethers that include skating, swimming, bowling or hiking. It's a great way to celebrate a birthday and there's no need to limit games to once a year. When your child has friends over on a weekend, don't automatically head to the video store to rent movies. Instead, provide skates, kites and a ride to the park. If you meet with resistance, add a video camera to the mix and let them film each other clowning around or showing off - it's a temptation few kids can resist!

## **KEEP IT SIMPLE**

Organized sports teams are a natural choice for introducing healthy exercise into your child's life. But some kids are just not cut out for team sports, either because they're intimidated by the competition or because they don't have the skills to feel successful in a team. Rather than battling it out with your child before every practice and game, explore alternatives to competitive sports that may prove more fun and exciting.

Just remember that there are easy ways to make exercise an enjoyable part of your family's life. And you can feel good about doing it because you'll be strengthening family ties too!

*As your EAP, we at MHN are working to provide you with the information you need to achieve optimal health and wellness. You can call us 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and as always, all calls are confidential.*

# **Communicating Effectively With Your Children**

Communication is a two-way bridge that connects you to your child's feelings. Healthy communication between parents and their children helps youngsters develop positive personalities and good relationships with other people.

Healthy communication builds your children's self-esteem because it makes them feel cared for and loved. With caring parents to listen to their concerns, children feel safe and able to express their feelings and needs directly in words. Children who are nurtured with their parents' attention learn how to manage their feelings without overreacting.

A strong bond with your children also helps you feel close to them and understand their needs. Understanding your children in this way gives you the tools to help them grow and manage the inevitable frustrations of being a parent.

## **BUILD THE BRIDGE OF COMMUNICATION**

- ***Be available.***  
Children need to feel that their parents are available to them. Even spending 10 minutes a day with each child makes the bridge of communication stronger. Get yourself into a quiet, attentive mood before you start listening to your child or talking about something important.
- ***Be a good listener.***  
Children believe they're important when they feel their parents understand them. Being a good listener helps children feel loved, even when they're upset and you can't do anything to fix the problem. Ask your child to tell you his ideas and feelings. Try to understand exactly what your child is saying. What your child is trying to tell you is important to him, even when it may not be to you.
- ***Show empathy.***  
You can show empathy even if you disagree with your child. Let your child know you've heard and appreciate her feelings. Showing empathy means making sure you understand what your child is feeling. Restate what your child has expressed and ask if your understanding of her feelings is correct.
- ***Be a good sender.***  
Your child will be in a better mood to listen to you if he feels heard and cared for. Make sure that what you say, your tone of voice and what you do send a consistent message. For instance, if you laugh when you say "no," your child will be confused about what you really want.

Be very specific about what you want your child to do. Use words to send messages, even with toddlers. Use feeling words when you praise your child's behavior. For example, you can say "I'm so happy" when your child puts his dirty clothes in the hamper. Encourage your child to praise himself as well.

Use "I" statements to tell your child what makes you unhappy about her behavior. It's better to say: "I was worried when you came home late from Jessica's house" than to yell "Why were you late for dinner again?" Tell your child what you feel and think, not what she should think or feel.

- ***Be a good role model.***  
Young children learn by copying their parents' behavior. If you use a lot of feeling words, it will help your child learn to do the same. Verbalizing feelings also helps children learn to control their behavior.

## **Menu Planning Made Simple**

You'll save time and provide more nutritious meals for your family when you plan meals a week in advance. Use this guide to help plan for your weekly shopping and menus.

A HEALTHY DAILY DIET FOR AN ADULT INCLUDES:

### *Breakfast*

- one serving of Vitamin C fruit (oranges, grapefruit, cantaloupe)
- high-fiber cereal

- whole-grain toast
- skim milk

### *Lunch*

- 3 ounces of meat or legumes
- two servings of starch (bread)
- one serving of vegetable or fruit
- skim milk

### *Dinner*

- 3 ounces of meat or legumes
- two servings of starch (potato, pasta, bread, etc.)
- one serving of vegetable
- fruit or light dessert
- skim milk

## **DINNER IN ADVANCE**

These freezable dinners will meet adult daily requirements for protein. Cook double quantities to allow for lunch-time leftovers:

- spaghetti
- chili
- vegetarian casseroles
- stew without potatoes (Potatoes don't freeze well unless they're mashed or blended with other ingredients.)
- hamburger dishes
- legumes

## **SALADS WITH A SHELF LIFE**

Serve salads to meet your family's daily needs for vegetables. Lettuce may wilt, but these salads can last in your refrigerator for up to four days:

- tomato, cooked green beans and onions in dressing
- cooked corn, peas with onion, celery and dressing
- macaroni salad
- potato salad
- raw zucchini, onion, cooked pasta, red cabbage and dressing
- cooked chicken, celery, pineapple chunks, nuts and sour cream

## **A WEEK OF SANDWICHES**

Sandwiches satisfy your dietary requirement for starch. Depending on the filling, they can also add to your daily protein intake. You can save time by fixing and freezing sandwiches for an entire week. Remove the sandwiches from the freezer each morning, and they'll be defrosted by lunch time.

You'll need a variety of bread, including pita bread, onion or french rolls and hamburger buns, and freezable fillings, such as:

- peanut butter
- lunch meats (low-fat ham, chicken and turkey breast, bologna and lean roast beef)
- leftover chicken or turkey
- tuna made with low-fat or nonfat sour cream or salad dressing

## **FREEZING**

- Store each sandwich in its own plastic bag.
- Label and date each sandwich.
- Put all of the wrapped sandwiches in one large airtight bag to preserve them longer.

## **TRY THESE CONDIMENTS FOR VARIETY:**

- jam
- relish
- barbecue sauce
- chutney
- sweet and sour sauce
- mustard
- ketchup
- honey
- sour cream
- horseradish sauce
- salad dressing
- cranberry sauce
- teriyaki sauce

## **Make Time for Fun and Relaxation**

A sense of play and the ability to relax are second nature to some people. These folks don't need to be reminded of how good it feels to whack a tennis ball over a net or help their kids build a model railroad. For others, it helps to be reminded that play and relaxation have a purpose.

## **WHY YOU NEED LEISURE**

- In addition to providing satisfaction in itself, as little as an hour a day of leisure time helps you stay in balance.
- Physical fun in the form of aerobic activity helps dissolve the tension that accumulates in your body during stressful times.
- When you add more leisure to your life, you'll become a healthier and more effective employee and parent.

## **HOW TO HAVE FUN**

Have you forgotten how to have fun? If so, don't lose hope. Play is serious business for kids, so take some cues from your children. Healthy, happy kids invest their entire heart and soul in their play activities. They approach their physical games and flights of imagination with a kind of abandon most adults have forgotten is possible.

- When it's your turn to play, choose some activities that are just for you. You can do other activities as a family.
- If you need to schedule leisure time activities into your busy day, do so.
- Pick sports, hobbies and outings that give you and your family a sense of enrichment of simply make everyone feel good.
- Remember to allow time for unexpected pleasures.
- Reserve quiet times at the beginning or end of the day to meditate or relax with a favorite quiet activity, such as reading or crafts.

## **DEVOTE YOURSELF TO FUN**

Once you've chosen an activity, put your whole heart and mind into it. If you have trouble letting go of worries and responsibilities, imagine that you've sealed your cares in a carton and stashed it under your desk for a few hours. The box will be there whenever you need to retrieve it. Here are some ideas for having fun:

## **PERSONAL RECREATION**

- Pursue a new hobby or revive a former one.
- Establish and maintain a regular exercise program
- Learn a new sport. Consider racquetball, cycling, jogging, boating or dancing.
- Join a book discussion group.
- Seek a creative outlet in crafts, music or art.
- Join a community group.
- Enroll in a class.
- Call someone you haven't talked to in a long time.
- Go for a walk in a new part of town.
- Visit an antique shop.

## FAMILY FUN

- Attend a sports or entertainment event together.
- Take your children to a special movie or amusement center.
- Go on cycling trips.
- Visit the zoo.
- Fly a kite.
- Take day trips to the country.
- Take walks around the neighborhood or to the park or library.
- Play charades and board games instead of watching television.
- Visit science and art museums.
- Make planning your vacation a family activity. Encourage your children to read travel brochures and library books about your destination. Discuss your trip and some of the sights you'll see.
- Participate in bike-a-thons, walk-a-thons and other fund raisers.
- Try family folk dancing and square dancing.

## Also in this issue:



### Coping with Postpartum Depression

The experience of childbirth can be one of the most significant and wonderful events in a woman's life. At the same time, the birth of a child brings many life changes that can be bewildering and frustrating. Often, the stress can combine with natural hormonal reactions, producing a broad and overwhelming range of emotions.

It is not unusual for new mothers to experience sadness, anxiety, confusion and fear. Some even feel jealous of their babies for stealing the attention they enjoyed during the pregnancy. Others feel a lingering sense of despair. This emotional stage is sometimes referred to as the "baby blues."

For many mothers, the "baby blues" fade and disappear within a few days or weeks after the child is born. But, according to experts, for as many as 20 percent of new mothers, these feelings can become more severe and affect the woman's ability to function. This condition, called **postpartum depression** (PPD), requires attention and treatment. If ignored, the symptoms can get worse and last a year or longer. The good news is that PPD can be effectively treated with medication and counseling.

#### KNOW THE SYMPTOMS

If you or someone close to you have recently given birth, and you suspect that you or she might be suffering from PPD, here are some warning signs to look for:

- Lingering or recurring sadness, frequent crying
- Lack of energy
- Feelings of irritability or restlessness
- Physical symptoms of stress, such as headaches, chest pains or palpitations, or rapid breathing

- Insomnia or extreme fatigue
- Trouble concentrating or remembering things, or making decisions
- Eating problems (either an excessive appetite or an inability to eat), accompanied by weight gain or loss
- Being extremely anxious about the baby, or feeling no concern for the baby at all
- Feelings of guilt or uselessness
- Thoughts, or fears, of harming yourself or the baby
- Inability to enjoy pleasurable activities, including sex

## WHAT TO DO

If you are experiencing the above symptoms consistently for more than two weeks after giving birth, you should contact your health care provider to discuss medical treatment. PPD can be successfully treated with a variety of therapies, including antidepressants and psychotherapy. (If you are breastfeeding, make sure your doctor is aware of this before prescribing any medications.)

There are many ways to take care of yourself if you are suffering from depression. Try to get enough rest, and nap when the baby does. Don't take on more than you can do - chores don't always need to be done immediately. Try not to anchor yourself to the house, and make an effort to spend time with others. Often, it helps to be in contact with other mothers who are experiencing the same challenges. PPD support groups are available in many communities.

Remember, you deserve to feel better - and your baby deserves a happy, healthy mom. If you are not satisfied with your health provider's response to your concerns, go to another doctor or ask for a referral to a mental health specialist



## Get Fit with Your Kids

Parents and kids alike need regular aerobic exercise to stay healthy. Mix weekly exercise activities with your kids and you have a recipe for health-enhancing fun that strengthens family ties. Adults need at least 20 minutes of aerobic exercise three times a week to stay healthy and combat stress. Kids' capacities for aerobic activity vary according to age, although many youngsters have enough energy to run circles around their parents. When you plan family fitness outings with your kids, choose activities that match their aerobic capacities, coordination and skill levels. Always keep safety considerations in mind. Here are some exercises you can do with your kids. For all outdoor activities, wear hats with visors, sunscreen and sunglasses with straps.

### WALKING

A walk around town, through the woods, in the mountains or on the beach is a great way for kids and their parents to stretch their muscles, burn calories and discover new sights together. For city treks, pack snacks and beverages in your backpacks. On hikes, add binoculars, nature books, compasses, maps and insect repellent. Be sure to wear sturdy, comfortable shoes for your expeditions. Try strapping your little ones into three-wheeled strollers meant for jogging.

### CYCLING



Even toddlers on tricycles and youngsters on bikes with training wheels can participate in family rides around town and on back roads. Make sure everyone's cycle is the correct size for their height. Bring water bottles, high-energy snacks and fruit. Wear approved helmets, use bicycle safety flags and carry a repair kit with patches, tubes, wrenches and an air pump.

## **WHEELS AND BLADES**

Roller and ice skating are activities adults and children can enjoy together. Many cities have special areas meant just for skaters. Knee and elbow pads will help cushion the blow if skin meets the pavement. Wrist guards can help prevent injuries from falls.

## **SWIMMING**

Water sports are great opportunities for family fun, but extra safety precautions are required. Never leave young children unattended in or near a pool, lake, river or any body of water. Younger children should always wear certified life preservers. Avoid inner tubes and "water wings." They don't provide adequate protection for young children. Adults who swim with their children should learn cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and other water safety procedures.

## **DANCING**

Most adults don't consider dancing an activity to do with their kids. But some forms of social dancing, including folk dancing and square dancing, are easy and fun for kids to learn. Investigate dancing opportunities at schools and community centers. Ask if children are invited to attend.

## **PARTIES AND OTHER ACTIVITIES**

Birthday parties at bowling alleys, skating rinks, miniature golf courses or parks are good ways to add physical activity to family gatherings. Think like a kid and you'll come up with other great ideas for family fitness. Kite flying, dog walking, skiing, treasure hunts, batting cages and walk-a-thons are just a few more ways you can mix fitness with family fun.



# **Business Travel**

## **PLANNING FOR YOUR ABSENCE FROM HOME**

Business travel is inevitable for many working parents. But there are ways to make job-related absences less traumatic for your family.

### **PREPARE YOUR CHILDREN**

✓	Help your children prepare for your absence well in advance.
✓	Explain why you're leaving and emphasize when you will return.
✓	Look at a calendar together and write down where you'll be on each day.
✓	Tell your children when you will call and mark it down on their calendar and yours.
✓	Describe the new experiences your children may have during your leave, and emphasize the fun aspect of these experiences.

- ✓ Ask you children to keep a journal or draw pictures about what they do each day while you're gone.

### **PREPARE YOUR HOUSEHOLD**

- ✓ Keep a supply of favorite convenience foods on hand so your family can prepare easy meals in your absence.
- ✓ If they're old enough, show your children how to use the dishwasher and other appliances.
- ✓ Make sure your children understand what their chores are while you're away.

### **COMMUNICATE WITH YOUR CAREGIVER**

- ✓ Leave all phone numbers where you can be reached.
- ✓ Make sure your child's daily routine is clear, including snack time, nap time, chores and household rules.
- ✓ Be specific about any medications your child may need.
- ✓ Highlight your child's favorite foods and how they might fit into a meal.
- ✓ Make an audio tape or video of yourself telling or reading a story so your caregiver can play it for your children at bedtime.
- ✓ List your child's favorite games, books, activities and outings, such as the zoo, library or park. Familiar activities will be comforting to your child when you're away.
- ✓ Leave a notebook so your caregiver can record your child's activities and meals or any problems and concerns that arise.
- ✓ If you're divorced, explain any visitation arrangements.

### **WHEN YOU RETURN**

- ✓ Review the notebook with your caregiver and ask for any suggestions about how to make things smoother.
- ✓ Ask your children about any anxieties and feelings that came up while you were gone.
- ✓ Access the trip yourself and make mental notes on how you'll plan for your family the next time you take a business trip away from home.



## Legal Services

Merely going about the business of living our daily lives, most of us at some point will find that we have questions about legal matters or require the services of a legal professional.

While many legal needs are relatively ordinary – such as family law or real estate issues – even the most mundane of these can be stressful and confusing. The legal tools, forms and information in the legal library can help you get started.

### **Getting Started is Easy!**

Call your EAP for more information.