

HEALTHY LIVING

50 ways to keep kids active

For summer vacation, here are some tips to keep children away from the TV and off the couch

BY PATTI GHEZZI

Cox News Service

Rani Quirk has plans to keep her two kids busy this summer. Both will be on the swim team. There will be sports camp for Ryan, 9, and Girl Scout camp for Madelyn, 11.

But structured activities only go so far, and when they run out, Quirk has some other ideas for keeping her kids active.

"There are simple things I can come up with that are right under my nose," the Marietta, Ga., mother says. "We just got a puppy, so my kids will be doing some dog walking."

Other calorie-burning activities: walking with Mom to a nearby shopping center, cruising around the neighborhood on a RipStik and going for bike rides.

Quirk knows the heat will be her enemy. "It's hard to say go ride your bikes when it's 95 degrees," she says. "When it's hot, you want to relax."

She foresees a few matinees in her family's future, as well as time just chillin' with a book or chatting with friends indoors. "We aim for balance."

Experts say summer can be a difficult time for parents trying to keep their children's rumps from melding to the couch in front of the television.

"Families get off schedule and lose their routine," says Dr. Mary Gavin, author of "Fit Kids! A Healthy Guide to Raising Healthy and Active Children From Birth to Teens" and medical director at kidshealth.org.

Here are 50 tips for keeping your kid off the couch this summer:

1 Have a routine, including a regular bedtime and wake-up time, even if those times are a bit later than during the school year.

2 Set expectations for your kids. Let them know they'll be exercising. Experts recommend about an hour a day of moderate to vigorous activity for children older than 2.

3 Assure your kids they'll have plenty of downtime this summer, and stick to your promise. Kids need downtime.

4 Look for ways to encourage your child to play without instituting a formal ex-



PHOTO BY FRANK NIEMEIR / COX NEWS SERVICE

"Simple things" such as badminton, dog walking, bike riding and other outdoor activities keep Ryan Quirk and his sister on the go in Marietta, Ga.

ercise program.

5 Restrict TV and computer access. Some experts take a hard line, calling for less than two hours per week.

6 Seize the opportunity to encourage any interest your child has in physical activity, whether it's yoga, tennis or golf.

7 Aim for a balance of aerobic exercise as well as activities that build strength and flexibility.

8 Consider a child's personality when looking for camps and activities. Not all kids like the competitive nature of team sports, but they might still enjoy throwing a baseball in the backyard.

9 Don't pressure your child to play a sport.

10 If your child plans to try out for the basketball team, help work on his or her jump shot.

11 Don't keep your child indoors out of fear of your child getting hurt, sunburned or bitten by a virus-carrying mosquito. "Physical activity comes naturally to kids, and we discourage them," Gavin says. "There are a lot of excuses we give to tell kids to sit down and be sedentary."

12 Spend time supervising your child outdoors, even if you'd rather be inside.

13 Assign calorie-burning chores such as washing the car or mowing the lawn.

14 Look for ways your older child can earn money while keeping fit. For example, maybe she can work as a camp counselor.

15 Find ways for kids to be active indoors. Beth Passehl, program coordinator for Fit Kids at Children's Healthcare of Atlanta, suggests coming up with silly games. For example, kids and parents can run up and down the stairs during commercial breaks when watching television. "Kids find that fun and interesting because it's something different to do," she says.

16 Turn on music to make indoor exercising energizing and fun.

17 Pick out activities a week ahead of time. Brainstorm with your child to come up with fun things. Make sure your child has time for exercise.

18 Exercise with your child. "When you are with your child, say, 'Why don't you go for a walk with Mommy?'" Passehl says.

19 Don't get into a power struggle with your child over fitness. You want him or her to be self-motivated.

20 Look for fitness opportunities that your kids' friends can participate in as well.

21 Conspire with other parents to come up with activities. Take turns supervising a game of flag football. Pool resources in finding out about camps and other programs.

22 Emphasize that wellness is more than just burning calories. Teach your kids the importance of using sunscreen, being social and keeping the brain engaged.

23 Never tease a child about weight. "Don't make comments about a child's size, good or bad," Passehl says. "They become judgments of our children."

24 If you're concerned about your child's weight, talk to your pediatrician. Don't put your child on a diet or exercise program designed for adults without speaking with your doctor first.

25 Make getting healthier a goal for everyone in the family, even the naturally skinny kid who can eat chips and cookies by the bag without gaining weight. That junk food is bad for cholesterol, and bad



PHOTO BY REBECCA MCENTEE / COX NEWS SERVICE

Older children can earn money while keeping fit, including mowing the family — or the neighbor's — lawn.

eating habits can catch up with your child in adulthood. "Treat everyone in the family the same," says Ruth Bell, coordinator of TIPPS for Kids, a Children's Healthcare of Atlanta program for prevention of Type 2 diabetes.

26 Reach back to your childhood for fitness ideas, say Trinity School teachers Susan Black, Nicole Magee and Beryl Horton. Jump-ropes and Hula Hoops are fun for kids of all ages.

27 Once your kids master jumping rope, try the double Dutch version.

28 Learn to ride a unicycle, juggle or ride a unicycle while juggling. Have a family contest to see who can learn the wackiest new skill.

29 If your kids don't know how to play tag, teach them.

30 Set up an obstacle course in the yard and see who can finish the fastest. Enlist your kids to help with the course and be willing to attempt it yourself.

31 Head to the park for a picnic and bring along a Frisbee, a football or a kite.

32 Look for places in your community that provide safe places to exercise such as a Boys & Girls Club, YMCA or community center.

33 If it's too hot during the day to play outdoors, head to a park after dinner but before dark.

34 On a really hot day, take your kids bowling or roller-skating.

35 Commune with nature. Try canoeing or camping.

36 Discover state parks and use them for hiking.

37 If your kids feel adrift without their tech-gadgets, try "Dance, Dance, Revolution," one of several fitness-oriented games played on consoles such as PlayStation 2 or Xbox, says Melissa Johnson, executive director of the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports.

38 Sign up for the President's Challenge (www.presidentschallenge.org). You can log your stats and work toward certificates and other rewards.

39 Use a whiteboard to keep a log of your family's activity. Build in incentives for when your family meets its

goals.

40 If you don't have a family dog, offer to walk your neighbor's dog and bring your kids.

41 Instead of renting a movie, rent an exercise DVD and do it with your child. See how many different DVDs you can try during the summer.

42 Find a volunteer project that involves exercise, such as cleaning up a park or a riverbank.

43 Visit the zoo and other attractions that require a lot of walking.

44 Instead of finding the closest parking spot, choose the one farthest away.

45 Have your kids earn dessert by doing jumping jacks or push-ups.

46 Wake up early, hike a trail and watch the sun rise.

47 Calculate the number of miles to your vacation destination, and make a plan to walk a portion of it.

48 Praise your child when she makes an effort to exercise without prompting.

49 Walk, walk, walk. It's the most popular form of exercise among adults. Teach your kids to love it, too.

50 Be a role model. Make time to stay fit, and your children will learn by your example. ■



PHOTO BY T. LEVETTE BAGWELL / COX NEWS SERVICE

Kids want dessert? Make them earn it with exercises such as jumping jacks.