

Fun ways to exercise as a family

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September is full of fresh starts. With kids trekking back to school and all those shiny red apples, crisp fall air and new energy, it is the perfect time to invigorate your family's health during National Childhood Obesity Awareness month.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, one in five U.S. children is obese. Unfortunately, childhood obesity carries major health risk factors throughout childhood and beyond, such as:

- increased risk of diabetes
- increased risk of certain cancers
- increased risk of bullying
- increased risk of depression and other mental illnesses

To combat childhood obesity and ensure the health and well-being of your entire family, try one of these fun ideas to start exercising as a family, no matter what age your kids may be.

With school-aged children:

You really can't go wrong with setting your children up for a healthy life by enrolling them now in recreational or school sports.

"When exercising with friends, there is a greater likelihood that your kids will stick with it. Also, the competitive nature of team sports gives kids that extra drive to push forward and succeed, not only in fitness, but in life!" says **fitness trainer Franci Cohen**.

Have them try a few before they settle on a favorite and most importantly, get involved with them on and off the field so you can both get your hearts pumping with some family exercise. During the off season," mix up their training by setting up a family obstacle course in the house or backyard and competing for fun prizes, like a family movie night or a trip to the farmer's market.

"Keep a family fitness chart to track progress, and reward great fitness accomplishments with prizes or a 'get out of laundry duty' free pass," suggests Cohen.

For the whole family:

“The best way for parents to fit exercise into a busy schedule, is to turn family time into fitness time. Use the hour after homework and dinner for fitness as opposed to movie night or a trip to the ice cream shop,” recommends Cohen.

Take advantage of the beautiful colors that nature has to offer this fall with a family bike ride. Find a bike trail online or locally and hit the road for a great, open-air experience that the whole family can enjoy. You can strap little ones in a baby carrier that can fasten right to the bicycle, or invest in a bike trailer that pulls behind the bike. Look online or at garage sales for a used trailer to make your trip even more affordable.

In the winter:

“In extremely cold weather, it’s best to take fitness indoors,” says Cohen. “Create a fitness playground in your basement or living room with a mini trampoline some cones and some jump ropes. Use a chair or stepstool for lunges or cardio step movements, and you can even grab some soup cans from the kitchen pantry to use as weights. Keep it fresh, keep it fun, and just keep moving!”