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Six Fun Tips for a Fit Family



The new school year is quickly approaching, which means less downtime for kids and more stress for parents. To make matters worse cutbacks in physical education, increased academic pressures, and ever-growing portion sizes in restaurants and at home are making families increasingly overweight.

But who says you can't make more time for the family and squeeze in a decent workout? The trick is to do both at the same time.

Tara Zimlik, fitness expert and founder of [Tara's Boot Camp](#) in Branchburg, New Jersey, teaches people every day how to maintain healthier lifestyles, no matter what their age or fitness level. Using her own family as an example, she helps families improve both their health and their confidence. "By making a commitment to family fitness, you can strengthen bonds and get yourself in shape, too," says Tara.

There's also the added benefit of setting your kids on the right path for later in life, when being fit will lessen the risk of diabetes, some cancers, heart disease, osteoporosis, and depression.

Try these strategies to get your family moving - this fall and all year-round:

1. **Start young.** Tara advises parents to get kids moving early in life which will promote healthy development and keep sedentary habits at bay. Even your toddler needs at least 30 minutes of structured physical activity every day, and should not sit still for more than an hour at a time
2. **Set realistic goals.** Not all children are star athletes. But keep in mind that your child may have never been given the chance to shine. You can help by being realistic about your child's physical ability. For some kids, even a jog around the block can seem intimidating. "Running ability is mostly mental," says Tara, "it's important to keep your child motivated by breaking down each goal, step by step."
3. **Get animated.** Running doesn't have to be boring! Get creative with your workout. Form a conga line and play follow the leader. Flap your arms whenever you see a stop sign. Try running while hopping, pumping your arms, playing air guitar — whatever you and your kids can dream up!
4. **Be a cheerleader.** A recent study of 200 students in grades 2 through 11 showed that kids of all ages want their parents to help them stay active. Cheer them on frequently and show your child that activity is a priority every day. Tara says to make sure your children know that you would never be disappointed with their performance. "Remember, this is both a workout and a bonding activity," says Tara.
5. **Use community resources.** Your family run doesn't have to be confined to your block. Keep it interesting by visiting different parks or neighborhoods other than your own. You can also check out whether your child's school, or a local university or community center, offers an indoor or outdoor track for public use.
6. **Be vigilant.** Although a family jog provides a convenient way for you to get out the door and run, the advantages don't come without risks to your child. Try to avoid running at night when visibility is limited. "Your exercise should be satisfying and safe for both you and your new companions," advises Tara. Also, leave distractions at home - including the iPod and the dog. Make this time simply about you and your kin.