

Make Fitness Fun for the Whole Family - 10 Top Tips

Sure, you know it's important for everyone in your family to get plenty of physical activity. But the lure of the couch can be strong. Sometimes, to make fitness fun for everyone, you need to kick it up a notch. Try one of these motivators.

1. Make it a (friendly) competition.

Some kids (and adults!) are inspired by the chance to strut their stuff and prove their prowess. Turn walks into races or backyard ball-tossing into real games with score-keeping. Make a dance party into an American Idol-style event with points awarded for the best moves. Who in your clan can take the most steps in a day, do the most push-ups, or twist into the most complicated yoga pose? You might be surprised! (Do keep your child's temperament in mind, though; this strategy will backfire with kids who are sensitive about their abilities, or who simply don't care about winners and losers.)

2. Step up the silly factor.

If you're dancing, go all out with crazy costumes and crazier moves. If you're taking a family walk, tell jokes or sing goofy songs as you go. If someone needs a new winter hat, pick up one of those funny fleeces that makes the wearer look like a court jester or a spiky-headed dinosaur. Who wouldn't want an excuse to go outside in get-up like that?

3. Hip hip, hooray for fitness fun!

Make up a family cheer and perform it whenever someone achieves a fitness-related goal. Too dorky? The point is to support each other and celebrate wins big and small. And that includes mom's and dad's successes, too. If parents run in a race or make a great out at a softball game, play it up!

4. Be newbies together.

As a family, choose a new sport and learn it together. Martial arts, horseback riding, and dance are especially well-suited to varying ages and skill levels. Or teach each other your favorite fitness activities. Kids love to reverse roles and be the instructor. Set aside a family workout time once or twice a week and take turns taking the lead!

5. Get a pet.

Okay, I am not seriously suggesting that you make this kind of commitment just to boost your family's fitness level. However, if you have a dog or are considering one, these family members provide a real reminder and encouraging reason to get up and move every day! Many cats and rabbits enjoy some active playtime too. "Getting a dog has really changed our life!" says New Jersey mom of four Ann Matturro. "While I jog behind Mina, our chocolate lab mix, my kids run, roller-blade, or scooter along too. At first they complained, but now they ask to take Mina to the park for her exercise."

6. Do it for a good cause.

Especially if your family has been personally affected by the issue, a run, walk, or even a car wash that benefits a beloved charity can provide just the inspiration you need for some family physical activity. Plus, you can't beat the extra feel-good message you're sharing with your kids.

7. Gather a group for fitness fun.

Sure, you love spending time together as a family — but mixing it up a bit can be motivating too. Plan an active outing (swimming, biking, sledding, you name it) with another family. Team up to walk to school together. Invite a few of your child's pals over for a backyard ball game or trip to the playground. Activity loves company!

8. Treat yourself to a toy.

Yes, you can get plenty of physical activity with free or cheap equipment—or none at all—but a special new toy or game is a gift that keeps on giving. Next time you're shopping for a birthday or holiday present, pick up one that encourages activity.

9. Go thematic.

Take a cue from teachers and build a whole "unit" around your child's favorite activity, sport, or athlete. Devote an afternoon to basketball, say, with themed crafts, foods, books, and, of course, active games. (Plan it the way you would a birthday party—only without all the extra guests!)

10. Go outside.

If all else fails, kick everyone out of the house and wait for inspiration to strike. You're much more likely to find it outdoors than in.