



# How to Get Your Family to Exercise More



Many Americans are out of shape. Our eating habits are not great, and we want to be healthy. There are some people who really enjoy exercising, but there are many gym memberships that go unused. One key to keeping fitness goals is accountability, but most of our friends are as busy as we are. Finding a day and time to exercise together can become difficult to keep.

One solution to this (and other problems) is to exercise with your family. We love our family members, know about each other's health issues, live in the same home, and probably share the same medical plan. Since you are already together, instead of sitting in separate areas of the house in front of screens, make a commitment to exercise together. Here are a few tips to help your family exercise more.

- **Make a Plan.** We've learned this in other areas of life. It has been said, "If you aim at nothing, you will hit it every time." As a family, have the discussion about exercising. Find something or a few things you each enjoy and can commit to for at least a month. The plan should be S.M.A.R.T.
  - » **S** Specific. (What activity or activities will we do?)
  - » **M** Measurable. (How often and when are you going to exercise?)
  - » **A** Achievable. (What is something each of us can realistically do this month?)
  - » **R** Relevant. (What exercises can we do, knowing our limitations of time, physical fitness, money, and interest?)
  - » **T** Time-Limited. (How long are we going to do this before we re-evaluate?)
- **Fun exercise is more likely to be done.** Many types of exercise are boring, but some can be fun. Sports are a good example. An ideal answer is a sport that everyone enjoys and can do together. Look for some free exercise videos online or inexpensive apps with instructions for exercise. Imagine finding a 20-minute exercise video that doesn't require equipment and can



be viewed by the whole family on the television. You can exercise together in the living room.

- **Set realistic goals.** As a family, you can set some realistic goals such as:
  - » Each of us will exercise 5 days per week or 20 minutes per day.
  - » We will take a walk every evening.
  - » If one person is practicing for a sport, we all will practice. For example, parents can help coach the team or while one sibling is practicing soccer, the other sibling will practice basketball. Instead of sitting in the minivan during soccer practice scrolling online, get out and get in a few thousand steps during that practice.
  - » Respect everyone's school and work schedules. Once the kids are in school, each person's schedules become busy. Try to find ways to fit exercise into everyone's busy day. Re-evaluate and change as necessary.
- **Many families like competition.** Do you want to see your kids work hard? Put a scoreboard on the refrigerator door! Healthy competition (pun intended) can add some extra fun and "buy-in" for your family exercise plans. Many kids will choose electronics over exercise. But a jumping jacks competition with their siblings is something they want to win. You may even have prizes connected to their allowance or a reduction in chores.

Whatever you choose to do, always celebrate the wins. A little exercise is better than no exercise. One evening walk together each week is better than zero. Try to keep this a positive and fun exercise!