



Photo courtesy of Columbus Children's Hospital

During a therapeutic-recreation session at Columbus Children's Center for Healthy Weight and Nutrition, Rachael learns how to incorporate movement and fun physical activity into normally sedentary card games such as UNO.

## Think fun and functional

With instant messengers, video games and cell phones, your "cyber-age" child barely needs to lift a finger. Thirteen-year-old Rachael knows how easy it can be to let a day pass without being active. Columbus Children's Hospital's therapeutic-recreation program is helping Rachael see how she can incorporate movement into her day.

Rachael admitted that before beginning the program at Children's Center for Healthy Weight and Nutrition, she made a habit of going to her room to use the computer right after she arrived home from school.

She now spends her afternoons in different ways, including taking her German shepherd, Paquita, for walks.

"It feels good to get more exercise because otherwise I'd just be sitting around," Rachael said.

"Simply increasing the steps we take every day and seeing how we can lengthen activities can improve a child's overall fitness," said Andrea Hedge, a certified therapeutic recreation specialist (or CTRS) at Children's Hospital. It can be as simple as walking to get the mail every day. Hedge figures that's 100 extra steps they wouldn't otherwise be taking.

Children's Hospital CTRS Jennifer Kocher agreed. "It doesn't have to be a huge, high-tech activity. We don't expect 12-year-olds to go to the gym — just get up and move."

Oftentimes, the hardest part is finding the initiative to start.

"Everyone say that they're too busy," Kocher said. "We recommend making a chart of how you spend each hour of the day. Once you chart your day, you're often going to find there is a whole chunk of open time you could be utilizing. It's just a matter of starting."

Kocher and Hedge recommend fun and functional activities. Encourage your children to help run errands. Park the car far away from the store, or take a lap around the store with your children before beginning to load your cart. Give active card and board games a try. For example, each time a certain card is drawn or a particular move is made, players do five jumping jacks, 10 sit-ups or a lap around the family room.

"Whatever activity your children do, it needs to be what they want to do, not what you want them to do," Hedge said.

"Otherwise, it will become a chore and not a habit they enjoy."

If the activity involves movement, see if it can be more active. If it's sedentary, see how it can be made active.

The freedom to choose her own activities helps Rachael stick with the program. "I like doing more of a variety of activities like swimming and dancing instead of going to the gym to workout for an hour. I thought this would be more straightforward like, 'Do this. Do that.' but they give me more options to add to what I normally do."

It may seem like 100 extra steps a day or 10 minutes of straight activity won't amount to much, but everything counts, Kocher said. "When we first tell people it takes as little as this to make a difference, they have their doubts. But when you think about it, how often do your kids really move, I mean really move for 10 minutes without stopping? Any movement is good movement, and more movement is even better."

Experts from the Center for Healthy Weight and Nutrition at Columbus Children's Hospital provided the information for this column.