



Stepping it up the easy way

The holidays are over and winter has settled in. It's likely your children have enjoyed more than their fair share of sweet treats, and perhaps they've also caught a case of cabin fever. That's why February is a terrific time to increase activity, burn off those extra calories and gaining an invigorating dose of endorphins to help ward off those winter blues.

"This is a great time to focus on getting a little exercise, especially since many kids have a lot of pent-up energy after spending so much time indoors," said Kristy Fritinger, CTRS, a recreational therapist at Nationwide Children's Hospital. "And of course, parents can probably use the break this time of year as well."

The key is to know how to get started. Unfortunately for many people, just the word "exercise" is intimidating.

"We have come to associate exercise and physical activity with intense cardio workouts and the gym," said Fritinger. "The truth is, anytime we are up and moving, especially at a rapid pace, we are burning calories."

Fritinger recommends starting slowly. Look for everyday opportunities to increase activity. Take the stairs instead of the elevator; park farther from the entrance and walk. Steal back those valuable minutes lost during commercial breaks, and do a set of jumping jacks or sit ups until your television program resumes. Squeeze

in a set of push ups and leg lifts in the morning and before bed. Every little bit of extra activity adds up.

Don't let the cold weather deter you, either. Time outdoors may be limited, but many opportunities for a little fun and exercise are out there. Encourage your children to participate in errands. If they are old enough to shop unsupervised, divide your list at the grocery store and meet up when you're finished. Or take a lap around the grocery store or mall together before you shop. At home, make card games more interesting by adding a physical activity. For example, every time a player draws a card, he or she must do as many jumping jacks as the number on the card.

Don't forget opportunities for winter fun. Snow skiing is a great way to spend time together as a family and get some fresh air and exercise. If your kids are aching to get out of the house, take the family bowling or ice skating. If there's snow on the ground, bundle up and build a snowman together.

"Exercise doesn't have to feel like work to be effective," said Fritinger. "As long as you are moving and having fun, you are making progress."