

Creative ways to get your child off the couch

Getting children off the couch can be difficult, and computers, video games and text messaging haven't made the job any easier. Next to these high-tech gadgets, outdoor play can seem so last-generation. That's one of the reasons why specialists at the Center for Healthy Weight and Nutrition at Nationwide Children's Hospital are focusing on more creative ways to encourage today's tech-savvy adolescents to incorporate exercise and movement into their routines.

"It is my job to identify patients' physical activity options and formulate a plan that will work for each family," said Andrea Hedge, Certified Therapeutic Recreation Specialist, a recreation

therapist at Nationwide Children's. "Understanding the activities they do in their spare time will help us find creative ways to include new activities in their normal, everyday life."

Hedge says parents can do the same for their own children at home. The key is communication. Parents first need to talk with their children about their lifestyle and overall approach to health and wellness. To do this, Hedge recommends asking these questions: Are we active? Are we putting foods into our body that are going to give us energy rather than slow us down? What kinds of activities do we enjoy? What opportunities are available to incorporate exercise and

movement into those activities?

When it comes to making changes and increasing physical activity, Hedge recommends taking baby steps. For example, since television, computers and video games have become part of kids' routines, children and teens could try walking on a treadmill while watching their favorite shows. If they enjoy playing on the computer, replace the computer chair with a fitness ball to work on balance.

Today's video games are also offering new opportunities for children to increase their level of activity. Games such as Nintendo's Wii Fit, Dance Dance Revolution and Guitar Hero require participants to get off the couch and get active.

"We don't promote video games," said Hedge. "Actually, we caution families to keep screen time (TV, computer and video games) to two hours or less a day. With that said, these active video games offer a much more health-friendly alternative to traditional games."

If video games are a family-favorite, Hedge recommends parents opt for games that incorporate activity and movement instead of those that do not.



These active games keep the player moving, which uses energy. And the more energy used the less that is stored in the body as fat.

One of the most important ways to keep children active is for parents to be involved. Look for ways to exercise together, such as going for a walk after dinner, playing a sport together as a family, or taking turns on the treadmill during a favorite television show. Grocery shop together and work as a family to prepare healthy meals that everyone can enjoy. Children will be much more receptive to making healthy lifestyle changes if their parents join in on the fun.

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

"Active video games are changing the trend in gaming to make them more health-friendly. These games put a fun spin on staying active, which is one of the most important aspects of any physical activity regimen—to actually enjoy it."

— Andrea Hedge, CTRS, recreation therapist,
Center for Healthy Weight and Nutrition at Nationwide Children's Hospital