

Four reasons to focus on family health and fitness

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Many people think about ways to stay physically fit as individuals. But what about creating a health and fitness plan for the entire family?

Much like having a regular family dinner, scheduling time for [physical activity](#) and health maintenance brings families closer together and improves their overall well-being.

"Exercise has [health benefits](#) for all ages," said Dr. Lindsay Lafferty, a [family medicine](#) and sports medicine physician at Penn State Health Medical Group ? Lime Spring in Lancaster. "For [older adults](#), [exercise](#) prevents falls and helps maintain independent living. For children, it increases socialization and self-esteem. And for everyone, it improves cognition, wards off anxiety and depression, and improves sleep."

Here are four reasons to prioritize family health and fitness this fall:

1. It reduces your risk for chronic health conditions. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

(HHS), staying active reduces the risk for heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, dementia and breast, bladder and colon cancer. Regular exercise also helps shed excess weight. For optimal health, HHS recommends 150 minutes of moderate exercise a week for adults and 60 minutes of exercise daily for children. What does "moderate exercise" mean? "Do the talk test," Lafferty said. "During moderate exercise, you can talk, but need to take a breath every few words."

2. It helps parents serve as good role models. When children see their parents getting more active, they're more likely to follow suit. The same is true when children see their parents attend well visits with their primary care providers. "Use well visits to keep children up-to-date on immunizations and to discuss exercise and nutrition," Lafferty said.
3. It's a great time to make a change. As families get into the school year groove, they develop a routine. "Adding exercise to that routine will help you keep fitness a family priority all year long," Lafferty said.
4. It's easy and fun. Start simply. Play a game of soccer in the backyard. Walk to school or the bus stop instead of driving. Take a family bike ride. Struggling to get started? "Take an online quiz that asks about your exercise style," Lafferty said. "When your family finds an activity they like to do, they'll stick with it."

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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