

EAT SMART. PLAY HARD.^{(tm)*}

A Monthly Menu of Family Activities

Joan Elledge and Linda Murphy**

Over the past century, the American way of life has become one of less physical labor. Automation and technology have made it easier for us to accomplish the tasks of daily living. People hop in the car to drive two blocks to pick up a paper, a loaf of bread or a take-out meal. Children no longer walk a few blocks to school. Less activity plus the added calories of the 'super size' value meal has led to an increase in the incidence of overweight and obesity.

For children, the lifestyle change is compounded by the amount of screen time engaged in each day.

Children average 5 hours a day watching TV, videotapes, and playing video games. That is more than any activity other than sleeping. (Robinson) Add the time spent in front of a computer and the associated health risks may be compounded. (The Future of Children)

What can parents do? Setting limits on screen time is one strategy. For further information, refer to VCE Publication 348-966, *EAT SMART. PLAY HARDTM*, A

Guide to Healthy Eating and Exercise for Children and Adolescents.

What to do with time once spent in front of the screen? Get moving as a family! Modeling behavior is a powerful teaching tool for children. Children are more likely to pursue physical activities if parents engage in them as well. (Patten)

The following list provides some ideas for families to become more physically active:

- Involve all family members. Activities pursued as a family also strengthen family ties.
- Make household 'chores' part of family activities and fun. After all, most of these activities expend energy and don't require additional time for exercise.
- Keep activities fun.
- Select a few activities that may become part of your family rituals.
- Select at least one seasonal activity each month from the list that follows.



**Remember that activities
pursued as a family also
strengthen family ties.**

*Food and Nutrition Service, USDA, <http://www.fns.usda.gov/>

** Extension Specialist, Assistant State Program Coordinator, EFNEP/SCNEP, Virginia Tech; and Extension Agent, FCS Family and Human Development, Virginia Tech

LD
5055
A762
no. 348-968
C. 2

January

Bundle up, grab the shovels, and all help clear the walks and driveway. Pile the snow for the next activity.

Build a snow fort, create a snow family, and make angels in the snow.

Participate in an active winter sport (skiing, skating, sledding) as a family.



February

Explore the outdoors for animal tracks and identify them.

Check with the local mall, schools, YMCA, or Parks and Recreation for availability of walking programs and other family recreational opportunities.

March

Check local state parks calendar of events to have your family participate in nature walks and schedule one or more with the family.

Plan walking/hiking outings in the many local and state parks.



Have a clean-up party! Tackle the garage or the roadside by your home. Make a game of these activities and be careful.

Walk or run around your neighborhood or park with a kite.

April

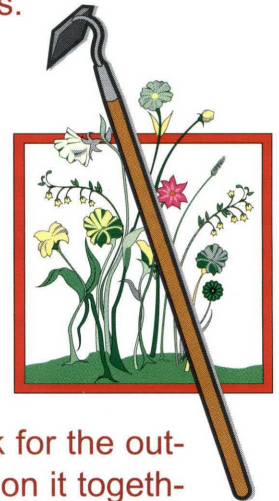
Take a hike in a nearby field or woods to identify spring wild flowers. Don't pick!

Work up garden plot and plant cool weather crops. Set aside space for the kid's own plants.

If April showers trap you indoors, create theater productions from favorite stories or try indoor gymnastics.

May

Plant a garden. If you are limited on space, use containers. Plan as a family so everyone has something they can do.



Assign everyone a task for the outdoor upkeep and work on it together. Make games out of identifying the bugs, plants, or other tasks that need to be accomplished.

June

Enjoy water sports. Go swimming, canoeing, rafting, or fishing.



Take advantage of nice weather with sidewalk games such as hopscotch, jump rope, and hula-hoops.

July

Walk along the beach, river or creek and collect stones or shells. Try to identify and explore their history. A follow up trip to a museum might be called for.

Play beach or water volleyball.

Put on your bathing suits and create a ground water slide in the backyard.

August

Go on a backyard or neighborhood scavenger hunt.

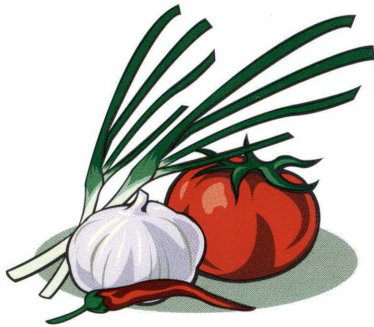
Play games in the backyard, i.e. hide 'n seek, greased watermelon race, three legged race, egg toss, tag.



September

Park at the far end of the parking lot when shopping. Identify the number of different license plates or kind or color of cars on the walk across the lot.

Become involved in your child's school and be an advocate for recess and physical education.



Plant fall vegetables and flowers. Make a pot of soup or veggie pizza from those wonderful fall vegetables.

October

Take a walk in the woods. Collect colored leaves to identify, preserve and use in craft projects.

Create a haunted house or backyard course.

November



Have a leaf raking party. Pile the leaves, take a break and jump and roll in the leaves.

Plant fall bulbs or prepare your garden plot for winter. Include a spot for attracting the birds and other wildlife.

December

Give gifts that encourage physical activity, i.e. sport equipment, season ski passes, or a month of roller-skating passes.

Check with the local Parks and Recreation, YMCA or other community program about winter offerings.

Make piñatas. Fill with non-food treats. Have fun breaking them open.

Whatever activities you choose to do as a family, be sure to take precautions that the activity is safe and appropriate for the ages of your children. If you choose to pursue a sport that requires safety gear, get advice on proper fit and use. The Consumer Product Safety Commission is a good source of child safety information. Check out their web site for the latest information at www.cpsc.gov.

Family Activity:

As a family work up a plan to become more active. The following worksheet will help you get started:

What do you do now?

What are your goals?

Present amount of time spent watching :

TV/Videos _____

playing video games _____

using computer _____

Total screen time _____

Goals for screen time _____

Present amount of time spent exercising:

Daily _____

Weekly _____

Goals for family exercises:

Daily _____

Weekly _____

Activities we plan to take up:

Days or week and time for each:

Monday _____

Tuesday _____

Wednesday _____

Thursday _____

Friday _____

References:

"Children and Computer Technology," The Future of Children. Volume 10, No. 2, Fall/Winter 2000.

Patten, P. "Obesity in Children: Should Parents Be Concerned?" Parent News for January-February 2001, National Parent Information Network.

Robinson, T., M.D. MPH. "Reducing Children's Television Viewing to Prevent Obesity," Journal of the American Medical Association, Volume 282, No. 16, October 27, 1999.

For further ideas, check out the following:

365 After School Activities: TV-Free Fun Anytime for Kids Ages 7-12 by Sheila Ellison & Judith Gray.

365 TV Free Activities You Can Do With Your Child by Steve and Ruth Bennett.

Check your local library for books of activities or books on sports.



Thank you to the members of the Childhood Obesity Task Force for their input into this guide sheet.

Reviewed by Deborah D. Snead, Extension Agent, Family & Consumer Sciences, Family & Human Development, Craig County, Virginia