

House Calls

by Rikki Schuster, PA-C

Since I am both a mother and a health care provider, I am extremely interested in the unfortunate epidemic of childhood obesity. The statistics are overwhelming, with as many as eleven percent of U.S. children ages six to seventeen being seriously overweight, or obese, according to the Centers for Disease control. You can decrease your children's chances of becoming a part of this statistic by focusing on increasing their fitness level.

If you have been neglecting (or just not making a priority) your children's fitness, you may be helping to raise yet another generation of overweight, unfit couch potatoes. Basically, lack of activity combined with poor eating habits are to blame for the increase in overweight children.

Some experts blame two major factors in the reason why our children today are on the average heavier than generations past. One is the fact that many children are no longer riding their bicycles or walking to school as was a standard mode of transportation in years past, therefore decreasing the amount of calories burned on a daily basis. Even more bothersome is the statistic that on average, American children spend at least twenty-five to thirty-five hours per week watching television, playing video games, or sitting behind their computers. Ironically, by the time children graduate from high school, they've typically spent far more time at the computer or television than they have in front of their teachers.

As parents, we must take control of this preventable epidemic. We must encourage our children to obtain a higher level of fitness. At a minimum, parents should ensure that their children engage in at least thirty minutes of physical activity most days of the week.

One of the keys to succeeding in keeping your child in a healthy, fit state is to become a great role model. You must set an example for your children and lead them. Exercise regularly yourself, and better yet, exercise with your kids! Consider assisting with your children's recreational sports teams as a coach, sponsor or helper. Launching a family fitness program and making it a way of life is another way to keep fitness as a top priority in your family. A weekly fitness outing might include walking, jogging, hiking, kayaking, swimming, cycling, soccer, or basketball. The Outer Banks provides a perfect backdrop for family outings at one of our many parks, bike paths, or beaches. Don't forget to add climbing Jockey's Ridge to your check list.

With the numerous school sports programs and recreational teams that the Outer Banks has to offer, there are so many opportunities for your children to become a part of an organized sport. Friendly competition is a great incentive to stick with a physical activity, and a way to develop lifelong friendships. You should try to support your children by attending these events, and if timing is not convenient for your schedule, arrange for a friend, grandparent, neighbor or sitter to show support for your child. Knowing that the adults in their life are not only interested, but are actually taking the time to come out to the events and show support is a wonderful incentive to stay active.

Getting your children's friends involved in physical activity is a fantastic way to not only keep your children fit, but to spread that healthy lifestyle into our community. Throwing sports parties, leading biking outings or vigorous playground games are a few ways to encourage the whole gang to participate in physical activity

while having a lot of fun at the same time.

If we all attempt to adopt a healthy lifestyle by incorporating daily physical activity into our routines, we are giving our children a lifelong gift by making exercise not a chore, but a way of life.

Rikki Schuster is a certified Physician Assistant with nine years of experience in Emergency Medicine and Urgent Care. She currently practices with Medical House Calls, where she evaluates and treats minor medical illnesses in the comfort of your home, school, day-care or workplace. She can be reached by calling 252-475-2007.