

# Lifestyle Tips



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## Family Physical Activity Influence

Becoming a parent is a life-changing event in many ways. New parents are notoriously busy, but this doesn't actually mean they're staying physically active. Parents are less physically active than non-parents in general—and this is especially true for mothers. To explain these differences, we can look at the barriers people face when it comes to getting moving on a regular basis. Research finds that parents report common barriers to physical activity more often than non-parents. These barriers include:

- Lack of time and social support
- Fatigue
- Obligations to childcare and other roles

Parents' lower levels of physical activity deliver a 'double whammy' when it comes to family health. Less physically active parents are compromising their own health, but their patterns also impact the family as a whole. Parents' levels of physical activity correlate with their children's levels of physical activity—especially when it comes to boys. Another important factor when it comes to children's physical activity patterns is how much parental support they get. It's not only what parents tell their kids, but how they live their own lives and make their own choices. Parents impact their children's physical activity through their support, encouragement, role modeling, enrolment in activities, transportation services, as well as their choices and support of sedentary behaviour.



So, at a hectic time in their life, when diapers or homework seem to fill up the day, how can parents fit physical activity into the family routines? You don't have to reinvent your lives and you don't have to give up. There are ways to be physically active and stay active, despite busy family lives. Some suggestions are:

**Be a sporty spectator.** Go to recreational facilities that make parental physical activity possible while you are watching or waiting for your kids in their activities:

- o Take the arena stairs up and down while your child is at hockey practice.
- o Use a facility that has treadmills that overlook the pool or rehearsal studio so you can watch your child in their lessons and be active.
- o Walk laps around your child's soccer field.
- o Try mother-daughter yoga or learn martial arts together.
- o Take on the role of assistant coach.

**Replace four wheels with four legs.** Walk your children to school or other activities. You will all benefit from the fresh air and the "together time."

**Start a family fun night.** Have a family physical activity night once a week, where everyone does something together. Try going for a bike ride, skating, bowling or mini putt. Let each family member take a turn in choosing the activity.

**Screen out screen time.** Consider trying a "screen-free" night once a week, where everyone in the family agrees to turn off their computers and the television. Make sure parents and children participate together to set good examples and share in the fun alternatives.

Be creative and get input from everyone in the family. You'll be surprised with the ideas you can come up with to increase physical activity for the whole family.

