

I love the thrill of running on Chicago's lakefront when the first glimpse of Spring appears after another brutal winter. Sunshine, blue skies, and an invigorating sweat: "Ahhh."

I'm happy to be part of the cadre of other runners, walkers, roller-bladers, bike-riders, moms and dads with baby-joggers, boot-campers, team-in-training marathoners, dog-walkers, yogis, Frisbee-throwers, and volley-ball players. Any type of exercise feels good!

I've lately been aware of how many little tykes join their parents on their scooters, bikes, or tricycles, and it's great to see children being active with their families. And, exercising with family is a great way to keep fit while spending time together. Creating an active lifestyle with children will give them a lifelong appreciation for activities that keep them strong and healthy.

By making exercise fun and integrating "play" into being active is an easy way for parents to promote physical fitness and spend quality family time together. As you might guess, spending recreation time together fosters a healthy family environment. And, being active as a family fosters a healthy life-style.

Social science research studies have proven that everyday family activities (playing in the yard, gardening, playing a board-game) and more novel activities (vacations, special events, sports events) are positively correlated with family cohesiveness.

Unfortunately, as families' schedules become increasingly more demanding, carving out "family time" seems more difficult than getting your toddler to eat broccoli. And even worse, it's easy to come up with a hundred reasons not to exercise. But, if parents focus on the idea of "playing" together, kids will stay excited and adults will have fun!

The first step is setting a good example by being a role model for your children. If you want active kids, you have to be active yourself! This can be as easy as inviting your family to kick the soccer ball in the back yard, or join you on a walk.

Bring back some favorite pastimes from your own youth, like jump-rope or hopscotch that promote balance and

coordination. A high-energy, stop-and-go running game, like tag or hide-and-seek elevates the heart rate to burn calories. You don't need to be on a team to enjoy the aerobic benefits of basketball, tennis and swimming - great activities for athletes of all ages. If it's too cold to get outdoors: turn on some music and start dancing! (That's a sure way to rev up the heart rate, and reel in the laughter.)

Playfully engaging in active leisure time with the family enhances your quality of life and your relationships with loved ones. And keep in mind that "family" isn't always limited to blood-relatives. Diane Sawyer's exiting words on Good Morning America were: "The best joy for us is when friends become family and family become friends." So, whoever your family may be: hug them, love them, and play with them!

## Curb the Couch Time... Play Together!

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