

Let's play!

YOU'RE NOT JUST A FAMILY, YOU'RE A TEAM! RENÉE VINCENT SHARES A FEW IDEAS ON HOW TO GET ACTIVE WITH YOUR WHANĀU THIS SUMMER.



of different types of activity and movement. That's why it is helpful to think about physical activity in terms of play. When we think of physical activity as play, we tend to be creative, to be open to trying new things. And we tend to have fun.

There is a big difference between a gym session and chasing each other round the garden with water balloons or doing a fun run together. When we play with our children we are strengthening our bond with them. We are role modelling that physical activity is enjoyable, and showing them how to set goals and achieve them.

By exercising together we also overcome some common barriers to exercise, such as not having enough time, not feeling motivated, not enjoying exercise, or needing to look after the children. A significant barrier to physical activity as a family when children get older is simply their unwillingness to participate. That's why it's important to create the habit early on, so that it becomes just 'what you do' as a family.

To become more physically active as a family, the first step is to make a plan for ways in which you can exercise together. If

participate in physical activity so that our kids develop a lifelong healthy relationship with exercise.

There is compelling evidence that children need plenty of physical activity to build strong bones and muscles; to decrease the likelihood of developing obesity, type two diabetes and heart disease; and to promote good mental health. But we can't hope to have healthy active kids if we're not active too.

Research has shown that all the members of a family play an important role in establishing healthy and physically active lifestyles for children and encouraging

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this throughout their life. Parents often feel that if they are encouraging their children to be active, then that will be enough. They'll often make the effort to sign their children up to sports teams and drive them to activities, neglecting their own physical activity in doing so. However, there is a strong argument for families to be physically active together: the family that plays together, stays well together.

To get the most benefit from physical activity, children need to be exposed to lots

As the days get longer and the trees burst with new life, we naturally start to feel more like heading outside and getting moving. You can really capitalise on this impulse by planning your family's physical activities over the summer months. While many families already make time for physical activity, in the rush and bustle of modern life, it is easy for some members of the family to not get the exercise they need for good health.

The current World Health Organization guidelines are for children and teenagers to do 60 minutes or more of physical activity daily, and for adults to do 150-300 minutes of physical activity per week. As the mum of a six-year-old, life is a lot less physically demanding now than it was when my son was little, when we'd both be moving, running, playing, throwing or catching for decent periods of time every day. Now I can leave him to play outside on his own, and if he has a friend over, I don't have to join in their physical games. Once parents don't need to be involved in their children's physical play, it is common for many to become much less physically active. And while my son is extremely active and enjoys almost any form of sport, I definitely notice that when life gets busy for Mum and Dad, it gets harder for him to get as much activity as he needs too.

PLAY FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY

It is easy for us to think of exercise as an individual pursuit that we undertake to improve our own physical health. However, as a parent, being physically active is about more than just your own health. We have a responsibility to role model, plan and

you have young children, then get together with other adult members of your household and brainstorm ideas for fun activities and times you could schedule them. If you have children who are old enough to participate, then get them to join in the planning. You'll find a lot of ideas below to get you started. The most important part is to actually create a calendar and schedule this physical activity playtime into your week.

As with any goal, it's important to make it achievable, so if you're not in the habit of being physically active, make sure you start with shorter periods of lower impact exercise and build up to getting more vigorous with your exercise. This will ensure you don't hurt yourself or burn out. You'll have to pitch the activity to the least fit member of the family, but try to choose activities where the fitter

members can work harder and others can participate at a gentler level.

GETTING OUTDOORS

I'm based in Auckland and we are blessed, like most places in New Zealand, with an amazing range of outdoor play spaces. This summer you could have a go at exploring your city or region more systematically. Auckland, for example, has at least 35 regional parks featuring walking tracks, beaches, picnic grounds and camping facilities. It also has 48 volcanoes within 20 kilometres of the city centre. By taking the family to explore one of these spaces you'll create opportunities to get moving without any expense. Many regional parks are great places to set up for the day with the family. You can bring

along sports equipment to play games on the beach, water sports equipment, or simply walk, swim or run.

You can also create new experiences by exploring a new suburb and discovering playgrounds and parks you've never been to before. It's fun to play tourist in your own city. You could increase the buy-in from resistant children by getting them to create a photo diary or putting them in charge of making video recordings of each outing. My friends with older children meet resistance to family outings quite often, so be creative about incentivising participation and increasing buy-in.

You can also have a great time outdoors without leaving your own backyard. Plan a treasure hunt or scavenger hunt, build an obstacle course and time runners, have

water fights, set up a tent and spend time building a fort, or all do some gardening together. Don't forget good old-fashioned 'elastics', jump rope, four square, or hop scotch. One of my son's favourite things is having a dance party on the trampoline.

These days it is fairly inexpensive to own a wide range of sports equipment to keep the family going. Make it normal for at least some of the presents at birthdays and Christmas to be new sports equipment and you'll soon build up your arsenal of bats, balls, frisbees, nets, goals, cones and so on. Encourage your children to take turns choosing the type of game to play so that each family member gets to discover something they enjoy. You may have one child who is completely put off by rugby but would play jump rope for hours. Encourage the kids to get outside when they have friends over. Children who aren't as sports crazy as my son have a great time discovering all the different types of sports equipment in our garage and they're all drawn to different things.

Equipping the whole family with a scooter, bike or skateboard lets you get moving in a different way. Auckland is rapidly expanding its network of family-friendly bike trails, and skate and scooter parks are popping up all over the place.

Including physical activity as your form of transport is an obvious way of upping your exercise, but many families are put off by time constraints or safety concerns. However, even walking/biking to one activity a week helps to show your children that they can get places under their own steam while building their physical confidence and skill. So be sure to schedule some incidental exercise this way too. One day they will hopefully be living in a city where getting everywhere by bike safely is a reality, and these early experiences will be invaluable.

MOVING INDOORS

When we're forced to stay inside, it's easy to find that everyone is spending too much time on their electronic devices, but there are plenty of ways you can get moving inside as well. Firstly, you can put the electronic devices to good use

and find games and apps for the children that incorporate physical activity or find family-friendly guided physical activity on YouTube, such as Go Noodle. Invest in board games that have a physical element such as Twister. Turn up the stereo for a dance party or have a game of balloon volleyball. The internet is a great resource for indoor games that get people up and moving. I recommend writing up an ideas list and keeping it on the fridge door for easily accessible inspiration.

There are also a growing number of commercially-run indoor play spaces that provide indoor trampolining, inflatables of all shapes and sizes, rock climbing, skateboarding and the like. These can be used as a reward for being physically active through the week.

DOING GOOD

Another way to keep motivated and get moving is to get physically active while volunteering for a worthy cause. Examples include tree-planting or beach clean-up days, or volunteering to walk a sick neighbour's pet, or do their gardening. This teaches positive values at the same time, and for some people, this is much more satisfying than going to the gym.

IN THE CLUB

There are also great activities you can do as a family that are more structured, such as orienteering and geocaching. These are often run by clubs or can be found on the internet. Orienteering is a great example of an activity which suits all levels. Dad could help the preschooler round the family course while Mum and the older sibling race in their age group.

Sports clubs of all codes often try to make the club accessible to families, so keep an eye on what your local clubs are offering. Our local cricket club is offering a great skills programme for four- to six-year-olds that also includes parental participation and social activity, making it a fun Friday night activity for the whole family.

Keep your mind open and get brainstorming with your family, then go and get moving. Here's to your fun summer of playing together! •

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