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NSWMulticulturalHealthCommunicationService

NSW Multicultural Health Communication Service
website: www.http://mhcs.health.nsw.gov.au
e-mail: mhcs@doh.health.nsw.gov.au
phone: (02) 9382 8111

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HOW TO GET YOUR CHILDREN MOVING

NSW HEALTH
DEPARTMENT

How to Get Your Children Moving

How do your children spend their free time after school or on the weekends? Are they playing outside or in the park? Do they play sport, ride their bikes or roller-blade with friends - or do they spend long hours sitting in front of television or computer games?

Just as adults in Australia are becoming more overweight, so are their children - according to research, up to one third of children are overweight. The problem is that overweight children turn into overweight adults who are then more at risk of health problems such as heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure and some forms of cancer.

One of the main reasons why children today are more overweight than children of a generation ago is because they spend less time moving around - Australian children, for instance, now watch an average of 20 to 30 hours of television every week. They don't even have to move to change the channel - they can use remote control instead. They don't have to get up and make themselves something to eat either - they can just arrange to have a pizza delivered by phone.

In an effort to save time and make our lives more convenient, both adults and children rely more and more on gadgets and services which reduce physical activity. Lifts, escalators and touch-button garage doors are very useful, but they mean we spend less time moving.

This is why it's important to encourage children to be active - besides preventing weight problems, physical activity helps them develop good co-ordination and have more stamina. It also helps reduce feelings of stress which are common during adolescence. Here are some ways to keep children moving:

- Limit the amount of time children spend watching television - children who watch less television are generally fitter than other children.
- If school is in walking distance, walk instead of driving them to school. Walking to school with children also gives you time to talk to them.
- Make walking part of family recreation - take them to explore bushland areas, go for walks in the park or on the beach. Use these times to help children learn about their surroundings. If you make walking and other outdoor activities a family habit, children are more likely to continue to be active as they get older.
- Look for family outings that involve walking such as visits to the zoo or a museum.
- Encourage children to participate in sport. But if they don't enjoy playing sport, help them find other activities they enjoy doing instead, such as swimming, dancing, self-defence, indoor climbing or yoga.
- When you choose presents for children, look for things that encourage them to be active such as frisbees, balls and kites or active outdoor play equipment such as swings and slippery dips.
- Set a good example - whenever you can, walk instead of driving to the shops; take the stairs instead of the lift; walk up escalators instead of standing on them.

Telephone numbers are correct at time of publication but are not continually updated. You may need to check the numbers in the telephone directory.