

Health unit offers tips to keep kids moving during COVID-19 pandemic

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When children get enough active play, there's a marked improvement in their cognitive abilities, academic behaviour and overall attitude.

The fact that Canada was recently assigned a D- in physical activity - for the third year in a row - according to a ParticipACTION report by the Healthy Active Living and Obesity Research Group at the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario Research Institute - isn't being helped by the current COVID-19 pandemic.

With sport leagues suspended, and public parks and schools closed at least for another month - perhaps until the end of the school year - many children are missing out extra opportunities to be physically active.

Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge District Health Unit registered dietitian Aisha Malik has a few ideas on how to keep children not only active during isolation at home, but maintain a healthy diet as well.

"When talking to children about healthy lifestyle, I recommend applying the 'first, do no harm' approach and take focus away from body weight as it can result in low self-esteem and body dissatisfaction," says Malik. "It's important not to link healthy eating and physical activity to weight."

Malik says parents can encourage children to choose foods which are nutritious by explaining they provide energy to help them learn, play, and grow. She also suggests parents remind children to be "mindful eaters" and listen to their hunger cues; eat when they are hungry and stop when they are full.

It's also important to limit distractions such as screens when eating.

"As families are spending more time together, it is a good opportunity to prepare healthy meals, snacks, and learn cooking skills together," adds Malik pointing out the website www.unlockfood.ca has great family and budget friendly recipes to try.

Parents can encourage physical activity as a means for physical and mental well-being and enjoyment. "Healthy bodies come in different shapes and sizes and if children and families are eating well and staying active together, they will achieve a healthy body," says Malik.

"Families can try their favourite activities together during this time such as play scavenger hunt in the house or yard. If not in self-isolation, they can go for walks and bike rides."

There are also plenty of websites offering parents creative ways to bring outdoor games, indoors such as balloon volleyball; rope, yarn, a pool noodle or even a bed sheet can serve as a net. Using masking or painter tape, parents can mark out 'nets'

in hallways for soccer, broom ball and hockey, or even create an indoor hopscotch board. Empty water bottles or similar light weight containers can be turned into bowling pins.

"Right now, the skies the limit when it comes to keeping kids active. There's nothing wrong with dancing in the living room."