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## Blending Exercise Into Family Life

**I**t all works out so well in fitness magazines. The young executive stops by the health club after work for a 45-minute workout, not including time spent getting ready and getting out. She arrives home for dinner feeling great. Exercise blends into her life with the rhythm of a well-oiled rowing machine.

But is this real life for most people, especially parents? You don't read about a dad having to race home from work to tend to a sick kid, change a diaper, and help get dinner on the table. Maybe after the grocery shopping is done and the kids are tucked in, he can combine exercise and quality time with his wife. They call it the housecleaning workout.

Whether you think you have time for it or not, exercise is essential for a healthy life. Experts for years have said that regular exercise—even moderate exercise such as walking—will help you improve fitness, lose weight, and reduce your risk of health problems like heart disease. To reap these benefits, you need about 30 minutes a day of exercise,



several times a week. If you also count time spent traveling to your club or gym, dressing, warming up, cooling down, and showering, a workout can easily consume 60 to 90 minutes of your day.

But if you plan wisely, help your family understand your exercise philosophy, and maybe retool the way you view "working out," you can adopt exercise as just another member of the family.

### Family Fitness

People who have a strong family support system and strong commit-

ment to family in activities other than exercise will experience the least conflict when trying to exercise amidst a busy family life. Here are a few tips on making exercise family-friendly. These pointers can also help avoid disagreements and conflicts about exercise commitments. No single method will succeed for every family, so choose the options that make most sense to you.

- Communicate your exercise goals to your spouse and discuss how they affect your family.
- Have a positive attitude about exercising that encompasses the

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whole family, and be a mutual source of emotional support for each other's activities.

- Walk with family members. Young children may prefer to ride their bicycles while you walk or jog.
- Plan robust family outings like a hike in a park or skating at the neighborhood rink.
- Buy a baby jogger and spend time exercising with your youngest. Many children even fall asleep while in a baby jogger. But leave the dog and headphones at home.
- Go to a local track to exercise. Children can play on the infield.
- As a family, designate responsibilities that must be met before exercising.
- Rethink the way you view exercise. On some days, working out may mean doing yard work or a "house-cleaning workout." Household chores do, in fact, burn calories and can give health benefits.

### Taking Care of Busy-ness

Besides incorporating exercise into family life, another approach parents can use is to optimize the occasional lulls in their schedules. The suggestions below may help you find the time and energy to exercise on your own. (The last five tips are from the New York Road Runners Club.)

- Be organized, so that the rest of your life is operating smoothly and all your other responsibilities are being met.
- Try establishing a routine. Many people rise early to exercise before daily responsibilities begin. The energy gained from regular exercise may compensate for any lost sleep. In fact, exercise might even help you sleep better.
- Try letting something go. Are there

low-priority activities you can stop doing to make time for your good health?

- Walk whenever possible—to and from church, work, the store, or a friend's home.
- Avoid elevators when practical. Walking up or down as many as six flights of stairs is usually faster than waiting and riding, and you will feel better.
- Pencil in exercise on your daily calendar. Schedule exercise just as you would any other meeting or obligation.
- Keep exercise clothing in the trunk of your car. You may be able to walk or run while waiting to drive family members home from their activities. Also, keep exercise clothing at work. You may be able to work out at noon or at the end of the workday.
- Engage your coworkers. You can accomplish as much walking and talking as sitting in a meeting room.
- At home, jump rope, do step aerobics, or buy a home rowing or cross-country ski machine.
- Keep free weights or dumbbells in your desk or closet at work and pump some iron during breaks.

### Bonds of Steel

You know that exercise is good for you, so make it a part of your daily schedule. You can successfully balance the demands of exercise with other responsibilities. When family conflicts arise, work them out together, allowing everyone's input to help solve problems. **PSM**

*Remember: This information is not intended as a substitute for medical treatment. Before starting an exercise program, consult a physician.*