Family Play Leads to Fitter Kids
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The calendar is filling up fast. School activities, recitals and homework can all compete for family time. Many families rush through the day, wolf down a fast-food dinner and fall onto the couch exhausted at day’s end with a TV remote in their hands. The rest of the night is spent in a blur of sitcoms and reality shows.

“That same family, if they would do something physically active, would feel re-energized at the end of the evening,” said Ken Bell, professor of kinesiology at Boise State University.

As an advocate for promoting activity in the family, Bell encourages adults to “come out to play.” When adults are outside gardening, walking or playing ball, the kids will generally follow suit.

Bell said that many adults aren’t active because they grew up thinking exercise was a dirty word and that being physically active meant “killing themselves” in the gym for an hour. Now we know that anything that gets the body moving can be counted as exercise, and short bursts of activity can add up throughout the day to help maintain overall health.

This can be as simple as taking the stairs instead of the elevator or parking farther away from the grocery store.

When adults are more physically active, they are more productive as workers and have fewer sick days. A more active lifestyle should have a similar, positive effect on children, Bell said.

Adults can also be advocates for promoting physical education classes and recess in school. These classes help to make children healthier individuals and go a long way to help curb childhood obesity.

The best way for kids to be active is for parents to be active. Following are a few ideas to promote physical activity in the course of a day:

1. **Have fun.**
   Find activities that the family can enjoy together such as walking, cycling, bowling or fishing.

2. **Get outside.**
   There is a strong correlation between the amount of time spent outside and being physically active.
3. **Keep trying.**  
   Most people aren’t star athletes, so begin with fundamentals and build to more complex activities.

4. **Be encouraging.**  
   Physical perception is a huge part of self-esteem, so give lots of pats on the back for any improvement.

5. **Sign up.**  
   Join local recreation centers, school clubs, intramural sports teams and summer camps. They are all great ways to get activity in your life.