



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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FITNESS AND FUN IN THE SUN

Butte County, CA. - It's summer time and that means fun in the sun! Aim for 60 minutes a day of active play with your family this summer. The beautiful outdoor surroundings of Butte County provide a wonderful environment for children to have fun and explore while building the foundation to a healthy, active lifestyle.

The health benefits of physical activity are tremendous. Prevent diabetes, high cholesterol and high blood pressure – conditions that are beginning to be seen in children. Regular physical activity is proven to reduce the risk of developing such conditions. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that one in three children born in the year 2000 are likely to develop Type 2 diabetes. Don't let your child be a statistic!

Physical activity benefits more than your child's physical health, it also enhances learning. Current research confirms that the physical activity of young children is an important component of early brain development and learning. The California Department of Education recently announced a link between physical activity and test scores. Children who were physically active on a most days of the week achieved higher scores. Even as early as infancy, you can provide an environment that grooms an active child.

You can take the 60-minute/day challenge by making it a point to include active play into your family's daily routine. Here are some fun activities you can try with your young children:

Infants

- Provide tummy time - although it is recommended that you never place babies to sleep on their bellies, it *is* recommended to give them time on their bellies while awake. Spread toys just outside their reach so they can stretch and scoot for items. Lay on the floor in front of your child. Babies can't help but try to lift their heads to look at you, which enhances their back and neck strength.
- Encourage movement - limit your baby's time in infant seats, swings, and strollers. If children spend too much time confined, they won't have the opportunity to explore their world through movement. When babies are on their backs, place mobiles or hanging objects within fingertips reach, encouraging them to bat at the toys.
- Walk the talk - be a good role model from the start and exercise with your child. Lift and lower

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your baby, dance with your baby or take your baby for a walk. If they see active play as part of your lifestyle it will likely become part of theirs.

Toddlers and Preschoolers

- Ball play- practice throwing, catching, kicking, rolling, and striking balls. Beach balls are an excellent toy for exploring tots.
- Parachute Fun- you don't need a store bought parachute to get the laughs and giggles rolling. Simply use a sheet or a towel and shake, shake, shake. Try throwing and catching a beach ball with your parachute.
- Dance- all you need is some fun music to get in the groove and start dancing. While you're dancing, ask your child if they can hop on one foot, jump high, jump low, clap overhead, or clap down low. Play freeze dance by pausing the music and freezing like a statue until you start the music again.
- Streamers and scarves- simply give your child a small section of a birthday streamer and let them run and be creative. Use the streamer like a paintbrush and draw imaginary shapes and scenes. Let your child work on his or her tossing and catching skills by tossing a scarf and catching it in their hands or on various body parts.
- Practice locomotive skills- children at this age are mastering running, galloping, skipping, sidestepping, jumping with two feet, and hopping on one foot. Visit a park and let them explore these movements - they will love it!
- Take a trip to the park- children have an opportunity to run, climb, crawl, swing, and slide. The more confident children feel about their bodies, the more likely they are to be active throughout the years.
- Water play- with the high temperatures of the north state, one can always count on water as a means of entertainment and activity. Give a child a hose and let them go. Paint shapes of all sizes with a paintbrush and water and practice jumping in and out. Turn the sprinklers on for refreshing entertainment.

OPT for Fit Kids, a program funded by the Butte County Children and Families Commission, aims to decrease the incidence of childhood obesity. Staffed by Registered Dietitians, Nutrition Educators, and Exercise Physiologists, OPT for Fit Kids provides free individual and small group nutrition and physical activity services for Butte County families and providers of children ages 0-5. If you would like more information, please call (530) 345-0678 or visit the website at www.optfotfitkids.org.

The Butte County Children & Families Commission was established following a voter-passed initiative in November 1998 and uses tobacco tax revenue to fund education, health, child abuse prevention, child care and other programs intended to promote early childhood development for expectant parents and children through age 5. For more information about local programs improving the lives of children and families in Butte County, please contact First 5 at: (530) 538-7964 or visit us on the Web at: www.buttecounty.net/bccfc.

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