



How to get your Screen Zombie Moving!

By Judy Arnall

The epidemic of overweight and obese adults and children is increasing: nearly two thirds of Canadian adults and about 28% of Canadian teens are overweight or obese. 87% of Canadian children do not meet physical activity guidelines in spite of government provided tax credits and mandated physical education classes in schools.

Parents can't force their children to exercise but they can do quite a lot to encourage and facilitate an active lifestyle, especially during family time at home. If a child is reluctant, how does a parent get their child to be more active when schools are cutting recess time and children increasingly spend their leisure time in front of screens such as TV, computer, and gaming devices? Here are ten ways to get your children moving:

1. **Set blackout periods.** Have specific times of the day or week that no electricity is on for machines. Well, except for lights of course! The children will find physically active things to do. Even more so if you send them outside to play. They may balk at first, but after a while, they will be having so much fun outside, that they will balk at coming back in.
2. **Get children involved in volunteering.** Many family volunteer jobs include physical activity, whether it's at the local food bank, or shoveling the neighbors walk, or cleaning up the city pathways or riverbanks. Many paid jobs for teens also involve lifting, moving and carrying, which is a good way for teens to get exercise.
3. **Do it with them.** Most children will get involved if Mom or Dad is also involved. Invite your child for a bike ride, rollerblade excursion, or time at the basketball net. Driving them to the swimming pool and then texting on your Blackberry in the viewing area sends them the wrong message. Get in the pool too! Besides,

most adults could use a little more activity in their life. It's good for everyone.

4. **Refuse to drive.** When children need to get somewhere, encourage them to bike, rollerblade, scooter, skate board, walk with their gang or take the bus. Even when children access the bus system, they still expand energy walking (or running if they are late) to and from the bus stop.
5. **Plan friend and family activity dates.** Rather than meeting friends or family members at a restaurant, plan a sport or physical activity for a "play date".
6. **Play active games.** Be open to providing funds for active games such as video game dance mats or the new get-fit video sports games on the market. Also offer to pay for outside or indoor sports equipment, but not for sedentary video games. Put your money where your values are and children will see that physical activity is important.
7. **Picnic, camp, or hike.** Get outdoors and the physical activity will happen. Bring Frisbees, balls, bikes and other sports equipment for a day at a local or distant park.
8. **Swim.** Most children love to swim if you drop them off at the local pool for the afternoon along with some buddies.
9. **Start a "walking school bus".** Offer to walk the neighborhood children to school if you are already walking yours. Parents could rotate turns.
10. **Start a "playground swap".** Parents who work during the day could reciprocate the favour of the walking school bus parents, by offering to be the parent supervisor at the neighborhood playground after supper. Designate a place and time for all the participating children to meet and one or two adults will walk all the kids to the playground and return back to the meeting spot at a designated time. Parents could rotate turns.

Staying physically fit doesn't have to be a big effort. Ten minutes here and fifteen minutes there all add up. Build small amounts of activity in every day and your whole family will notice the difference both in physical health and emotional closeness.

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