

## Community Health Coalition, Inc.

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**Date: January 24, 2016**

### **Exercise For All Ages**

#### **Children and Teenagers**



**Mary Fox Braithwaite, MD.**

Although U.S. health experts recommend that kids engage in moderate-to-vigorous physical activity for at least 60 minutes daily, only one in four actually does so, according to a report released by the Centers of Disease Control. It is important that the community and parents work on improving and encouraging all children and teenagers to participate in physical activities.

According to **Mary Fox Braithwaite, MD, MSPH, FAAP, Pediatrician at Chapel Hill Pediatrics and Adolescents, PA**, "It is much easier to break bad habits and establish long-lasting healthy ones when you do it early on. Parents should encourage their children and teens to participate in physical activity most days of the week."

Physical activity can include running, jumping and climbing for toddlers – and dancing, martial arts, gymnastics, swimming, club/team sports and much more for older children and teens. Try to turn family time into physical activity time for everyone such as taking walks outside, going for a bike ride, or playing a game of tag, kickball or basketball. If you don't have a yard, find parks or playgrounds near your home and plan to go as a family. Also consider joining community centers such as the YMCA. Many children and teens spend a lot of time in front of a TV, computer or tablet/phone screen, which leads to sedentary behavior and limits talk time with family members. Try to limit your child's total screen time to two hours or less during the weekday. If your child plays video games, consider choosing games and gaming systems that incorporate physical activity, such as Xbox 360 Kinect. For more information about fitness for children or other childhood health questions, talk with your child's doctor and visit [www.healthychildren.org](http://www.healthychildren.org) and [www.letsmove.gov](http://www.letsmove.gov)

#### **REMEMBER – To lead a healthy, active life, aim for:**

- 5 fruits and vegetables a day
- 2 hours or less of screen time (TV, computer, video games) per day
- 1 hour of physical activity a day, and
- 0 almost no sugar-sweetened drinks

## **Adults**

Let's face it, exercising is tough. Most of us if given another choice will choose to use our time in another way. Nevertheless, making a conscious decision to increase physical activity will allow you to reap both physical and mental health benefits. **George Brothers, Jr., MD, a retired Rheumatologist/ Internist states,** "doing something, no matter the length of the activity, is better than doing nothing."



**George Brothers, Jr. MD**

For many of us health challenges might limit our choice of activity. For those with arthritis it is better to exercise (within limits set by your physician) the affected joints since muscle deteriorates and strength is lost more rapidly in an arthritic joint. Strengthening the muscles supporting an affected joint might delay the need for a joint replacement. If joint replacement is necessary, it is better to have exercised than not to have exercised. Remember exercise will be part of your rehab! Exercise also has benefits for mental health. In some studies, mild depression can be improved and controlled with regular aerobic exercise. Some studies have shown that regular exercise also improves memory and learning skills by increasing new cell connections in the brain.

Exercise helps us to control blood pressure, weight, bone strength, cholesterol levels, and blood sugar. *In short, exercise no matter how slight, will probably decrease your risk for premature death.*

- If you have arthritis, diabetes, hypertension, a family history of early heart disease or are over the age of 50 see your health care provider before starting an exercise program.
- You may want to consult with physical therapy if you have arthritis since special programs are available for those with joint disease.
- Keep it simple. You do not need to invest in an expensive gym membership or buy equipment you do not need. Walk in your neighborhood and take the stairs at work. Don't always look for the close parking space. Park further away and walk!
- Schedule the exercise, mark it on your to do list for the day, it will be harder to ignore or forget.
- Start slow. Start by committing to 20 minutes a day 3 days a week and gradually increase to 30 minutes a day 5 days a week.

## **Remember:**

**Aim to limit your child's TV or computer screen time, Be active as a family, and Children need 60 minutes of play with moderate to vigorous activity every day**

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**Health Tip is a message from Community Health Coalition, Inc.** and is written in partnership with Central Carolina Black Nurses' Council Inc., The Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance of Durham and Vicinity, NC Mutual Life Insurance Company and Duke Regional Hospital.

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