

# The York University Staff Association Health & Wellness News & Views

With the COVID-19 pandemic ongoing for over a year now, it's a good time to take stock of the emotional and physical health of your family. At this unprecedented time, it's important to think of ways to assist the ones we love in staying healthy while maintaining our sanity and wellbeing. Ever wonder how entire families stay healthy, and fit together? Families that make healthy lifestyle choices together, stay healthy together. It's never been more important to protect your physical health as well as the health of your family.

Recent studies show that obesity rates among children and adolescents have nearly doubled in the last 20 years. As we are all aware, Covid-19 is having a massive impact on humanity. But why have we seemingly slept-walked our way into one of the biggest health risk factors of all, an obesity pandemic? It is estimated now that one out of seven children aged 6-19 is overweight or obese. (Obese is defined as 20 percent over your maximum desired body weight.) In March 2021 -- Obesity rates among children jumped substantially in the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic. According to a study published online in *Pediatrics*. Across the board in the span of a year, there has been a 2% increase in obesity. Experts worry the excess weight will be a continuing problem for these children. As parents we should do our best to model good routines and habits. For example, families might decide that they will stop drinking pop, or opt for a piece of fruit instead of a bag of chips or frozen yogurt instead of ice cream. Families can go for a walk together or a bike ride. Those sorts of little things can make a big difference in the long run.

Though it can be beneficial to support your local restaurants through this period of economic uncertainty, it's also important to be mindful of what you and your family are eating. Food experts say that parents hold the key to good health and nutrition. It is important for the health of families to plan and share family meals together. Statistics show that the family that eats healthfully, consuming colourful fruits and vegetables, lean meats and foods low in sugar, fat and salt, does so by eating healthy home cooked meals together. Controlling your own ingredients rather than relying on fast food makes it easier to eat healthy. Set good

examples by eating properly and making good choices. Children often mimic the eating habits of adults in the household. Keep healthy foods in the house. Talk to your kids about smart eating and encourage them to call you out if you grab junk food. Kids love feeling empowered. It makes them feel like part of the solution instead of feeling singled out as the only ones who must follow a healthy eating plan. Nourishing meals create an environment where loved ones feel healthy and safe. When families come together to eat, they create an emotional harmony that is pretty sacred for long term health.

Put down the screen. The connection between obesity and screen time is undeniable. First there is the junk food – the pop up ads make you and your families crave it, and what goes better with watching TV than a bag of chips or popcorn. Time spent in front of a screen is time spent NOT being physically active. Experts suggest that for every hour that you and your family spend in front of the TV or computer, you should also spend the same amount of time exercising or getting involved in some other physical activity. Exercising and participating in activities as a family can also aid in your family's spiritual and emotional well-being. Getting your whole family involved in physical activity shouldn't require bribes or threats. If you make exercise a priority, it's amazing how the rest will follow.

There are online exercise classes for appropriate for all ages and fitness levels. (FYI this is considered acceptable use of screen time) As long as you have access to pre-downloaded videos and/or a WiFi connection for streaming videos, you can exercise whenever & wherever you are. And instead of being locked into a specific class schedule online programs are almost all offered at your convenience. The below link provides several online workout programs to get you family moving.

<https://familyguide.com/12-free-online-exercise-resources-for-kids/>

Encouraging your family to move their bodies is important, not only for physical health, but also for mental health and cognitive development. Regular exercise is a proven mood-booster and reduces stress, anxiety and even sadness during these

challenging times. In addition, exercise prevents weight gain and can have immune-boosting benefits that help fight off infections, including COVID-19. However, keeping kids and teens physically active in the midst of continuing school closures, social distancing and sports shutdowns can be extremely challenging. Therefore, you may have to get creative. Fortunately, social distancing doesn't mean you can't be active. Tackle household chores as a united front. Consider assigning your kids age-appropriate jobs that do double-duty by helping you accomplish household tasks. Specifically, chores that require physical activity but that can actually be fun. Washing a car, cleaning the windows, gardening, or raking leaves will get their hearts pumping. Keep it fun by having a water fight after cleaning the car or having a race to see who can make the biggest heap of leaves. Then jump in the winning pile. These provide excellent opportunities for kids to build muscles and burn calories. Though the chore may end up taking a little longer to complete, the results will be worth it. A family that plays together stays together!

Just as important and physical health, mental health is being challenged on a daily basis as we persist through the pandemic. It is important to share your thoughts with your loved ones and invite them to follow suit. Instead of shutting off feelings and avoid speaking about the tough situation we are all facing, try having age-appropriate conversations with members of your family. Be sure to accept all expressions and interpretations of the matter with a neutral and relaxed understanding. Your family may be experiencing very different feelings and emotions than you are. Feeling free to express these emotions in a safe and non-judgmental environment can help improve levels of anxiety and overall wellbeing.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a stark reminder that the health of our population is, in many ways, fragile. In the face of the pandemic, we are all being challenged because of isolation, financial uncertainty, school closures, and ongoing disruption to daily life. Some challenges like this one are well beyond our control. Now it is more important than ever to find ways to come together and make our families health our number one priority.

'Striking' Increase in Childhood Obesity During Pandemic.

<https://www.webmd.com/lung/news/20210330/striking-increase-in-childhood-obesity-during-pandemic>

Fitness at Home.

[https://www.scripps.org/news\\_items/7027-kids-and-exercise-promoting-physical-fitness-at-home](https://www.scripps.org/news_items/7027-kids-and-exercise-promoting-physical-fitness-at-home)

#Healthy at Home

<https://www.who.int/news-room/campaigns/connecting-the-world-to-combat-coronavirus/healthyathome/healthyathome>