



## The Healthy Kids Series

# Think Fitness on the Way Back to School

| BY AMANDA AYERS |



**A**h, summer. Pool time. Vacations. Sipping lemonade while watching the sun set. Snap out of it! Summer is over! August means back to reality, and back to school. An essential way to prepare your youngsters for school is through exercise and healthy eating habits. Helping children adopt an active lifestyle early in life has a tremendous impact on physical, intellectual and emotional development. Research shows that kids who are physically active concentrate better in the classroom and retain more information.

In a recent article, Katherine Switzer, the first female to officially enter and run the Boston Marathon, offers simple tips to help parents develop a regular fitness routine and healthy habits for their children that will last a lifetime.

- Reinforce a positive body image. Exercise should be about fun and not about looking like a celebrity.
- Schedule regular exercise time periods and make exercise a priority. For example, schedule time for kids to go outside and play with friends or take the family pet for a walk.
- Help kids organize walking/running groups. Children spend several hours texting and instant messaging. Encourage them to walk and talk instead.
- Encourage sports participation. Organized sports build self-confidence and introduce new interests.
- Be a vocal advocate for regular exercise in your child's school. Lobby strongly for daily physical education classes. With tough economic times and budget cuts, it is necessary to prove the importance of regular exercise during the school day.
- Eliminate junk food from children's diets. Teach children good eating habits and do not make food a reward or an emotional issue.

Steve Coffman, Adapted PE Teacher at Hollin Meadows Elementary School in Fairfax, VA, advises that to get kids ready for school parents should spend time with their children participating in outdoor activities like walking, hiking and going to the park. Coffman advises, "During back to school night, ask your child's PE teachers for unique and fun physical activities to help jump start them back into school." Hollin Meadows Elementary School parent, Debra Lane, organized a running group for Hollin Meadows students in the fall of 2007.

Running and walking are

- *Sports for all ages.* There are running and walking programs for kids and adults organized all around the DC Metro area, with some running groups organized around specific interests. People learn to run and walk at an early age and many continue well into their 80s and beyond. Running and walking are sports in which everyone in the family can participate.
- *Perfect Exercises.* 30 minutes three to four times a week will result in improved physical fitness. Running strengthens the heart, lungs and major muscles of the body.
- *Accessible sports.* No matter where you live or go to school, there are areas that are safe for running and walking. Running clubs, youth running programs, and events can be found in nearly every city in the US. You do not need expensive equipment.

Events are a great way to inspire children to be fit and give them a goal to work towards. The Marine Corps Marathon Healthy Kids Fun Run will be held on October 24 in Arlington, VA. This one mile, un-timed race is for children ages of 6 to 13. Registration is open at [www.marinemarathon.com](http://www.marinemarathon.com) and is only \$5 for each participant. The whole family can join the rest of the fun and activities for free. Many schools compete for the MCM Healthy School Award, so ask your child's school to get involved; they could win a cash donation for their PE Department. [wFm](#)



Articles in the Healthy Kids Series are presented by the Marine Corps Marathon Healthy Kids Fun Run to be held on October 24, 2009. The one-mile run welcomes children ages 6-13. Registration is now open at [www.marinemarathon.com](http://www.marinemarathon.com).

Amanda Ayers is the Sponsorship Coordinator for the Marine Corps Marathon. No federal or Marine Corps endorsement implied.