



The Healthy Kids Series

Healthy Brains, Healthy Bodies, Healthy Kids

| BY KIMBERLY TRUBA |



This time of year, children of all ages are excited about freedom from the classroom, but the wide-open possibilities of an active summer shouldn't offer a complete break from mental challenges. For parents, keeping children's brains and bodies fit during the July and August can be an easy and fun task.

Stimulating your child's brain can be as simple as changing a daily routine that your son or daughter is accustomed to performing. By brushing teeth or opening a car door with the opposite hand, a child's brain must work harder on the task and focus in a different way. Try this out with a game of "Simon Says". By encouraging children to approach a routine motion differently, for example hopping on one foot then the other, brains stay stimulated AND bodies get to wiggle and move.

Another way to keep children engaged is by encouraging them to talk and ask questions. Whether it is retelling an account of a play date or sharing something observed at the park, all children have a story to tell. By articulating these events, children engage their brain in active thinking and processing. Encourage your child to share daily playground experiences, or

ask about a new skill learned in swim lessons. Not only are you supporting mental development, but you are furthering your bonding and relationship with each other.

As children take a break from PE and recess, they need additional physical activity to burn calories and energy. Enrolling your child in a camp or a sport can offer lessons in new skills and ways to use different muscle groups, which also poses challenges the brain.

Summer camps focus on both the individual, as well as the group, with activities to promote skill development, social improvement and exercise, all in one. To further the focus on individual skills, expose your children to activities in which they must set a goal. One idea is to train for a local running event, like the Healthy Kids Fun Run. Held in late October, children are able to train for the one-mile

run throughout the summer and set mini-goals along the way, like running around the block, running a quarter mile, etc.

Summer can also be a good time to introduce new habits to be carried into the school year. Most parents know a healthy diet is important for children's bodies, but the right foods can benefit their minds as well.

Deborah Jeffery, a registered dietitian with a private practice in Northern Virginia, offers a summer activity for parents. "Taking your children to a local farmers market is a great summer activity. It allows children to see what is available, and enables them to pick their own food like corn on the cob. Usually farmers are there as well, so children are able to hear how the fruits and vegetables were grown and picked. Plus, it is a great family experience." Afterwards, visit a recipe website with your children and let them come up

with ways to incorporate these new "brain foods" into their meals.

Whether you are introducing your child to healthier foods during the summer months, or letting them explore a different kind of camp, the ways to keep your kids challenged and active during the summer are as limitless as the outdoors. **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 opens May 13, visit www.marinemarathon.com to register. Kimberly

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