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A family that works out together stays fit together. Fitness expert Althea Shah urges you, the woman of the house, to take charge of your family's fitness.



Have you wondered how great it would be to include your family in your pursuit to exercise more regularly?

Exercising together improves the health of your loved ones, makes exercise more fun, and at the same time develops stronger connections between family members. With a little creativity, you can find a way to make it work for everyone.

Kids these days spend too much time sitting still, watching TV, using the computer and playing video games, and it's becoming a major health risk.

Increasing physical activity improves cardiovascular fitness, helps prevent obesity, promotes a healthy lifestyle, boosts self-esteem and confidence, and reduces stress. You don't need to have a lot of fancy equipment or a membership at a health club - there are many ways to make your family's lifestyle more active.

How to start

First, decide what level of participation your family is ready for. If your entire family is committed 100 percent, you could go as far as setting up a Family Olympics. If it's a struggle to get your family to do anything together, starting out

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small will be a better option.

You may simply focus on educating each one of them about the benefits of exercise - in a smart way.

Put up a 'healthy living' bulletin board in your kitchen (or use the fridge door) with articles and other resources that will help get your point across without having to say much of anything. For example, if one child is an athlete, an article about a successful athlete who commits to fitness could go a long way. Or, post a story about a young person who had trouble focusing at school but started exercising and saw an amazing difference.

Getting started...

1. Schedule a regular time throughout the week for physical activity.
2. Take turns selecting an activity for the family to do as a group each week.
3. Adapt all activities to suit those with special needs and preferences.
4. Help everyone find something active that makes them feel successful.

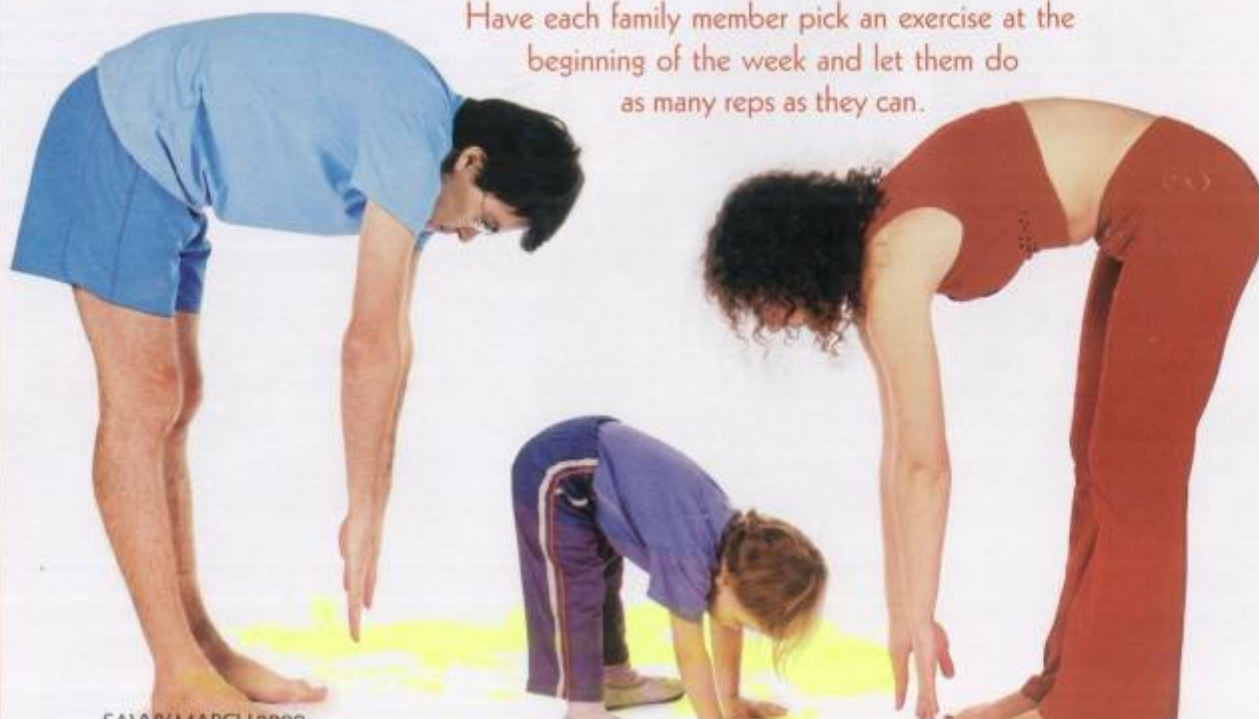
Remember:

It does not have to cost a lot of money to activate the family! You are only limited by your creativity!

Here are some ideas to get your family focused on fitness:

- *Combine exercise and household chores.* On small pieces of paper, write down chores and body weight exercises. Throw the papers into a couple of hats and have everyone pick one of each. Maybe dad gets to clean the bathroom and do a set of squats every few minutes until he is finished, while one of the children is cleaning the kitchen and doing forward lunges etc - the combinations are endless. Mix it up with seasonal chores, and even some aerobic components like jumping rope.
- *Hire a certified personal trainer* to design a program for each family member based on their individual needs, and then work out together. If mom is looking to tone her body and her teenage daughter wants to improve her basketball conditioning, a similar circuit can be set up at home, indoors and outdoors, to achieve both.
- *Have each family member pick an exercise at the beginning of the week and let them do as many reps as they can.* Then train throughout the week with the goal of improving by the weekend. The family member who has the highest percentage

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increase is rewarded with something small (but motivating). Keep the focus on the fact that everyone is improving.

• *Designate one evening as family fitness night.* Each week, a different person designs the family workout that you will all do together. Whether it's swimming, walking or playing frisbee - everyone gets to do something they enjoy, and your workout will never become dull.

• *Buy small pieces of equipment to keep around the house.* Then make some fitness rules: Exercise during commercials every time you watch TV; stretch before bed each night. Purchase a few inexpensive items (jump rope, resistance bands, stability ball, dumbbells) and rotate them through the house on a daily basis. Treat them as scavenger hunt finds - if you find the jump rope placed in the kitchen cabinet, you have to use it for one minute. Next time, you may find it in the wardrobe or near the dirty clothes basket.

Most of all - make it fun for everyone! In the process, you'll teach your children about discipline, goal setting, the importance of health and a family connection.

Here are some ideas for getting your family on the move:

- Take active vacations (hiking, swimming).
- At the mall or when running errands, use the stairs rather than the elevator.
- Get pedometers and have a contest to see who takes the most steps in a given week.
- Start a new tradition: take the whole family out for an after-dinner walk around the neighbourhood or park.
- Take on active chores as a family (gardening, or washing the car).
- Spend an afternoon at the local playground.
- Dance to your favourite music.
- Go for a family bike ride.
- Play miniature golf.
- Go to the zoo.
- Take the dog for a long walk.
- Whenever possible, walk short distances rather than using your car. When you drive, park a little farther away from the store.
- Play games - 'Tag', 'Simon Says', 'Fire in the mountain' - that your kids enjoy.
- Play a sport together - basketball, football, bowling, indoor swimming, indoor tennis, rock climbing.

Now that you have made good physical activity choices, keep a record in a log (see box).

Date	Activity	How Long	How Many	Who With	Reactions
6/3/09	Rode bike	1 hour		Mom	Fun
9/3/09	Chin-ups		10	Self	Difficult today
11/3/09	Walked	1 hour		Spouse	Enjoyable!

Althea Shah is General Manager, Operations & Fitness Expert, Gold's Gym India