

# Fitness

## Q & A with Dr. Fatima Stanford

Dr. Stanford: Hi, I'm Dr. Fatima Cody Stanford. I'm an obesity medicine and nutrition fellow physician at Massachusetts General Hospital. I'm also a research fellow at Harvard Medical School.

### Q : Why is exercise important for kids?

Dr. Stanford: Exercise is very important for every child because it helps reduce the incidence of developing a chronic disease like hypertension or high blood pressure or diabetes as we age. It is important for every child to strive to get at least 60 minutes of exercise daily.

### Q : Don't my kids get enough exercise at school?

Dr. Stanford: Oftentimes, I'm asked by parents, "Doesn't my child get enough physical activity during gym or recess?" And my answer to that question will be, "Absolutely not." Many schools have reduced their exercise requirements such that they may not be getting any physical activity or recess during the course of a given day. In order for children to reach that 60 minutes of required physical activity a day, it's important for parents and children to work together. This can be broken up into smaller segments such that a child can get 20 minutes three times daily, 30 minutes twice daily, or an entire 60 minutes.

### Q : My son doesn't like sports. What other activities do you recommend?

Dr. Stanford: If your child's a swimmer, have them swim. If they enjoy basketball, have them play basketball. If they don't like sports, don't make them do sports. There's so many other options available for physical activity. There's dancing, running, walking, playing active video games that get them off the couch and moving. The important thing is to keep them moving on a daily basis.

### Q : I know my son shouldn't spend all day on the computer, but how much is recommended?

Dr. Stanford: The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends two hours or less of screen time on a daily basis. This includes sitting in front of the television, playing on the computer, playing with a

tablet, use of apps on a smartphone. And so we ask that parents really take strides to monitor this for their children and their adolescents' well-being.

**Q : We live in an area where you really can't go outside to exercise. Do you have any suggestions?**

Dr. Stanford: Unfortunately, many children and parents live in areas that are unsafe, and they want to do activities that are indoors. I'm a strong advocate and believer in the use of fitness DVDs. There are different websites that are available that you can go and do an active video that can include everything from dancing to boxing to running in place, and I find that parents and children enjoy doing these activities together. It enhances their relationship and also enhances their health.

**Q : I'm really busy. I don't have time to exercise. Is that okay?**

Dr. Stanford: I think it's important for parents to be good role models for children in their adolescence as it relates to physical activity. When I was growing up, my father was very active in cycling, and this influenced my behavior, along with my sister's behavior, to be very active into our adult lives. So find an activity you like to do and do it, because we know it's important for you to be a role model for your child, and it's important for you to be healthy for your child.

**Q : How can I get my kids excited about exercise?**

Dr. Stanford: I'm a strong believer that every child can lead an active and healthy life, but it's important for parents to play a role in this. Parents can use exercise or physical fitness as a reward. Instead of rewarding your child for their good behavior with fast food and candy, why not take them on an excursion hiking or playing flag football or kayaking? These will be activities that will enhance the family, create a nurturing environment, and lead to overall well-being for both you and your child.

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