

Weekend Planning: Family Fun, Fit Mom

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As you think about your weekend plans, your to-do list is probably already growing. There are all the errands and odds-and-end chores that you don't have time for during the weekday rush of school and week – grocery shopping, catching up on laundry, and the kind of organizing and prep that makes the week easier but takes time to accomplish. You also want to spend some fun time with your family, and ideally, do something that you enjoy, too. Figuring out how to pack all of it into only 2 days is the hard part!

So as you think about how to spend time with your kids this weekend, think about activities that are active. First, that means you can get some exercise while you're with your kids, instead of needing to figure out separate time to work out. Second, and perhaps even more importantly, that allows you to set an active example for your kids. That matters, because research shows that when moms both encourage and model fitness activities, their kids are more likely to be active and make healthy diet decisions. This holds true for moms of preschoolers through moms of high school students – when moms are more active, they are more likely to value physical activity, and their children are more likely to be active. Interestingly, although active dads may encourage childhood physical activity, research shows that whether or not mom is active is a stronger predictor of whether or not the kids are active.

So as you think about your Saturday and Sunday fun activities, think about – what are things I can do in my area that are fun for me and the kids, and also active for me and the kids?

Start simple – think about places you can go for a great walk with your kids. Right now, fall is coming and the colors are changing – so an outdoor exercise activity can be as simple as a walk through your neighborhood, with a scavenger hunt for who can collect the most colored leaves. If you have a nice outdoor venue, such as a zoo or botanical garden, this is a beautiful time of year for a long, leisurely afternoon walking outside with your kids. Turn off all of your cell phones, wear comfy shoes, and enjoy the time with your kids. Other research has found that low-pressure, side-by-side activities, such as a walking, provide a low-threatening environment that allows pre-teens and teen-agers to feel more comfortable talking. Just listen as you walk, and you may learn all about what's going on at school.

You can also get adventurous and try something new. For instance, have you ever tried Geocaching? If your kid loves mysteries and pirate adventures, they may really enjoy searching for treasure in your area. With Geocaching, you use GPS coordinates (take your phone for this one!), and set out on a hike to find the hidden treasure. Bring along a pen and some sort of knick-knack – when you find the treasure box, sign the log book, and leave something for others to find. You can find GeoCache adventures in your local area at <https://www.geocaching.com>.

You can also combine your weekend physical activity with your charitable spirit. If your kids are 14-years or older, you could volunteer at a Habitat for Humanity build site. You can all get some physical exercise helping to paint, move supplies, and landscape (the kinds of activities allowed for younger teen-agers) while also feeling good that the outcome of your work will be a home for a family in need. Look for volunteer opportunities in your area at <https://www.habitat.org/>. If your kids are younger, you could

offer to help a neighbor or family member who needs some assistance – for instance, perhaps the widow on your block could use help raking leaves and pulling weeds in her yard, or the new mom down the street would appreciate you taking the baby out for a ride in the stroller so she can have 20 minutes to take a shower. Setting an example of helping others while getting physical activity is a great way to include our children in the things that matter.

And even if your kids would rather not go to school on the weekends, don't forget that the same school grounds are a great place to get active and have fun at no cost. You can both build your arm strength with the monkey bars and the rock climbing wall, you can play a game of four-square or hop scotch on the concrete, and maybe you can teach your kids some of your old double-dutch tricks. Bring a ball along, grab a few neighbors, and have an old-fashioned game of kickball. Or play freeze tag or red-rover. Find the fun game that leaves you laughing with your kid and having so much fun that you both forget it's exercise.

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