

YOUR Health

Los Angeles County Health Department - Public Health Programs & Services

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Keeping Families Healthy

“What makes for a healthy family? Certainly a family needs a safe place to live and develop. Other factors are important too: Access to medical care, regular exercise, healthy foods, and resolving conflicts without resorting to violence. This issue of Your Health looks at some of the things that help make the family, as a unit, healthy.”

Dr. Jonathan E. Fielding, M.D., M.P.H., Director of Public Health and Health Officer - Los Angeles County Health Department

Make Recess Part of Your Family Life

Children who watch more television tend to weigh more than their peers and exercise less, according to a 1998 study at the John Hopkins School of Medicine.

“One of the best ways for children to learn good physical fitness habits is for them

to see their parents exercising regularly - make fitness a family affair,” says Dr. Toni Yancey, Director of Chronic Disease

Prevention and Health Promotion for the Los Angeles County Health Department.

“We need to

get adults away from the five pounds a year weight gain lifestyle,” says Dr. Yancey. “We need to put the fun back into exercise and one way is to be active with your kids. According to the American Council on Exercise, physically active children have a stronger self-image, more self-

(Continued on p. 2)

Tricks for Safe Treats



Halloween is a holiday filled with high spirits. What child can resist dressing up for a nighttime quest for treats?

Help keep your Halloween activities safe too by following these tips:

- Make sure costumes let the child see well and move comfortably. Don't use masks that obstruct vision. Adjust costumes to make sure your trick-or-treater doesn't trip and tumble.
- Be careful crossing streets. Use crosswalks. Go along one side of the street to the corner and back again on the other side rather than crossing back and forth.
- Escort young children at dusk and try to finish before it's fully dark. Consider only visiting people you know or taking children to the local mall instead.
- Carry a flashlight or other lit Halloween decoration to make it easier for cars to see you and your children. Use trick or treat containers that light up or have reflective tape.
- Instruct children of all ages to not eat any treats until after you inspect the treats at home - in the light.
- Throw away treats that are not wrapped, or that have open or torn wrappers, or look like they were opened and resealed.

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confidence, increased energy, and fewer chronic health problems. At school, children learn to take regular breaks together for recess; it should be the same at home."

Set a good example for your children. The whole family can enjoy the health benefits of exercise such as reduced risk for heart disease or stroke.

Show children that exercise is fun and that movement is part of living:

- Have children join you in biking, hiking, or in-line skating. Play games such as tag, skipping rope, or shooting baskets. Physical activity can be anything that gets people off of their chairs and expends energy.
- Teach children, by your example, that physical activity is something people do as a regular lifetime routine - like brushing teeth or cleaning your room.
- Plan outings that involve walking such as trips to the park, nature trails, or the zoo. Join a



walking group or create one with other families.

- Include everyone in the family in vigorous chores like gardening. Put on music and dance while cleaning house.
- Have your child lead you in exercises. Let them be creative and you'll get quite a workout.
- Reward children for physical activity and recognize their fitness habits by giving them a ball, jump rope, or other exercise-related equipment.
- Take your dog for a jog; that way you'll both be healthy.
- Focus on the joy of movement and being active. Avoid competition and discipline. Maybe even skip the rules: inventing your family's own version of basketball or soccer could be lots of fun.
- For physical fitness, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the American Council on Exercise recommend doing a 30-minute or longer activity at least five times a week.
- Tailor what you do and when you do it to your own preferences - that way you'll be more likely to keep it up long term. For example, if you're a night person, early morning walks are doomed.
- Fitness also includes flexibility, so remember to include stretching to avoid injuries.
- Exercise and nutrition go hand in hand. Instead of high-calorie foods and snacks, eat more fruits, vegetables, and low- or non-fat foods.

Recapturing Recess

Now I know
Y'all can remember
The recess bell

The wave of exhilaration
The sigh of relief
The sheer release

The transformation
Of fidgeting
Into linear motion

Raise up your hands
If you can remember
All that pent-up energy

Exploding
Into air and space
And wind and sunshine

And if you can recapture
Even a little of the joy
Of unbridled movement

Then just maybe
There's hope
For the couch potatoes

Those of you
Too worn down
Even to fidget

Think you need rest and food
But you toss and turn in bed
And meals don't really sit well

These bodies just weren't meant
For so much sittin' and standin'
And so little recess

Antronette K. Yancey, M.D., M.P.H.
An Old Soul
with a Young Spirit.
Poetry in the Era of
Desegregation Recovery;
1997



Dates to Remember:

October 12 - December 3: Free Flu Shots for children and adults at risk. Shots are available at clinics and outreach sites throughout Los Angeles County. To find shots being given near you, call 1-800-427-8700.

October 24: L.A. Zoo, 10:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.: Free lead tests for children *and* every child tested gets a coupon for a free day at the zoo!

Women's Health

Early Detection is Key to Breast and Cervical Cancer Survival

More than 2 million American women will be diagnosed with breast or cervical cancer this decade according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Five hundred thousand women will lose their lives to these diseases and a disproportionate share will be women of low income and women of color.

Fortunately, the likelihood of surviving both of these types of cancer can be significantly improved through early detection efforts. The five-year survival rate for breast cancer diagnosed at a local stage is 97 percent. With a delayed diagnosis, after the disease has spread, the survival rate drops significantly. Likewise, women whose cervical cancer is diagnosed and treated early have a survival rate of nearly 100 percent.

Breast Cancer

Next to skin cancer, breast cancer is the second most common cancer among American women and is second only to lung cancer as a cause of cancer-related death. The CDC estimates 175,000 new cases of breast cancer will be diagnosed in women nationally in 1999 and 43,300 women will die of this disease. In Los Angeles County, the American Cancer Society estimates that this year alone over 5,000 women will be diagnosed and 1,200 will die of breast cancer.

Mammography is the best way to detect a breast cancer in its earliest, most treatable stage. A breast self exam is important as

well, and regular clinical exams by a doctor are essential. Mammography can locate cancers too small to be felt during a clinical or self breast exam.



There is not full consensus as to the age and frequency that a woman should have a mammogram, so discuss it with your doctor. The National Cancer Institute recommends that women age 40 and over receive a clinical exam and a mammogram every one to two years. Other national experts recommend increasing to annual mammograms starting at age 50. It's important to talk with your doctor to work out a screening program that's best for you.

For more information on breast or cervical cancer call the American Cancer Society at 1-800-ACS-2345.

The Los Angeles County Health Department coordinates 14 mammography centers around the county for women who would not otherwise be able to have a mammogram. To find the location nearest you, call 1-800-427-8700.

Cervical Cancer

The CDC estimates that this year in the United States there will be 12,800 new cases of cervical cancer diagnosed and 4,800 deaths from the disease. The Los Angeles County Cancer Surveillance Program reported 566 new cases and 160 deaths from cervical cancer in the county in 1996, the last year for which data is available.

Cervical cancer screening, which is performed by the Papanicolaou (Pap) test, does not detect cancer but finds pre-cancerous changes. Detection and treatment of such changes can actually prevent cervical cancer.

The National Cancer Institute and many other medical organizations agree on annual Pap testing for women starting at the onset of sexual activity or at age 18. After three or more annual tests have been normal, Pap tests can be less frequent at the discretion of the doctor and patient. Women who are past menopause still need to have regular Pap tests. Women who have undergone a hysterectomy in which the cervix was removed do not require Pap testing, unless it was performed because of cervical cancer or its precursors.

Prevent Birth Defects with Folic Acid

We all know that babies require proper nutrition to grow to be healthy adults. But did you know that, even at conception, a fetus requires a specific vitamin to prevent birth defects?

For a fetus in the womb, there is a critical time soon after conception when the mother's body must be able to provide enough folic acid for proper infant neural (brain and spinal cord) development. This critical time often occurs before a woman knows she's pregnant. That's why the National Institute of Medicine recommends that women of child-bearing age - even if they are not planning to get pregnant - have at least 400 micrograms of folic acid daily to prevent neural birth defects.

There are three ways women can get enough folic acid to prevent these defects:

- 1) Take a vitamin supplement containing 400 micrograms of folic acid daily. Folic acid is the synthetic form of the vitamin. When it occurs naturally in food, it's called folate. Folic acid is about twice as easy for your body to absorb as folate and is added to many grain-based foods.
- 2) Eat a fortified breakfast cereal daily which contains 100 percent of the recommended daily amount of folic acid (400 micrograms).
- 3) Eat more foods fortified with folic acid such as "enriched" cereal, bread, rice, pasta, and other grain products. Also, have foods rich in folate such as orange juice and green vegetables, citrus and other fruits, and liver.

Make folate and folic acid a daily habit. Like all B vitamins, they are water soluble; your body does not store them in your fat tissues so you must eat them every day. However, be careful if you take a multivitamin supplement to get your folic acid. The multivitamin may contain other nutrients, like vitamin A, that can be harmful if you take too much. Also, if you are being treated for anemia, ask your doctor about folate supplementation with zinc and copper.

For more information about folic acid, contact the Los Angeles County Nutrition Program at (213) 240-8621.

Domestic Violence: Let's All Talk About It

Whether it's about the family budget, how to discipline the children, or what video to rent, it's normal for people who love each other to disagree. However, healthy families resolve conflict without violence or abuse.

Unfortunately, the U.S. Department of Justice estimates that, nationally, nearly 1 million incidents of intimate partner violence against women occurred each year from 1991-1996.

"Home should be a place where people feel safe," says Billie Weiss, Director for Violence and Injury Prevention for the Los Angeles County Health Department. "The magnitude of domestic violence is hard to determine, but a first step in solving the problem of domestic violence is to increase awareness of the problem."

One of the first steps to increase awareness is to understand the full scope of domestic violence, also called intimate partner or family violence. It includes more than physical abuse of a spouse. It may also include emotional abuse, financial abuse, and may involve an ex-spouse, a boyfriend or ex-boyfriend, elders, or siblings.

It's also important to understand that intimate partner violence affects the whole family. A 1996 study in Child Abuse and Neglect found that each additional act of violence to a spouse increased the probability that the violent spouse would also abuse the family's children. In fact, the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control cites several studies showing that in about half of the families in which a woman is abused, at least one of her children is also abused, either by the original violent partner, or by the mother.

During Domestic Violence Awareness Month this October look for ways to increase awareness about family violence. The National Football League's Family Violence Prevention Fund suggests the following ways for everyone to be part of the solution to domestic violence:

- Talk to families, friends and neighbors to send a clear message that domestic violence is not acceptable.
- Take the time to talk to the woman you think is being abused and to call the police or 911 if you suspect a neighbor's argument is getting out of control.
- Raise the topic at club meetings, athletic games, and community gatherings.
- It's tough to get involved - but we must if we are to teach the next generation to behave differently.

If you are a victim of intimate partner violence, call your local battered women's shelter, such as the Los Angeles Commission on Assaults Against Women hotline at 1-213-626-3233, or the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-SAFE(7233) or 1-800-787-3224(TDD).

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