

MOMS WANT THE GIFT OF A HEALTHY FAMILY



By Jan Udlock

All moms want their growing families to be as healthy as possible, and regular physical exercise and good nutrition are vital. Does your family's health need a slight tune up? Here are some ideas to discuss.

Annual Well Child Check

Attend your child's well child check with a list of questions. Since your child's pediatrician has so many recommendations to discuss, don't assume she will remember everything. "Parents need to know that docs can't get everything every time so any concern you have or anticipatory guidance you want, you should not hesitate to ask for," says Deborah Gilboa, MD.

During the visit, let your child answer as many of the doctor's questions as possible. Bite your tongue if you



have to and don't be afraid of silence. It's easy to want to speak for your child, but allowing him to think about the question and answer it promotes self confidence in your child and rapport with the doctor. Also, your child's answer may be different than what you expect. You can fill in any missing information if necessary.

Talk to your doctor about any concerns you have about your child even if you're uncomfortable. If your child won't take medicines or is leaving the house without your permission, etc. "Without this information the doc cannot help you help your child. The doctor may be aware of resources in your community that you are not," says Gilboa.

Check to see if you can email health concerns to your doctor's office before the visit. An email can be an opportunity to present to the doctor about an issue

you don't want to address in front of the child. With some children, a doctor can address harder subjects with your child like overweight or stress issues. Older children view doctor advice differently than their parents input.

Keep Talking

According to Dr. Lisa Santora, CMO for the Beach Cities Health District, substance abuse is an overlooked health concern or one that is not addressed in the home. Kids are exposed to smoking and alcohol use in the home, on television or out in public. "Yet parents often do not feel comfortable or prepared to talk to their children about the risks of these behaviors," says Santora. Yet, the average age for a child to try alcohol is eleven years old.

If you haven't started talking about this with your children, start by asking questions when you see someone smoking or drinking on television. Ask your kids about what they know and why is it unhealthy? Keep calm and a non-judgmental tone to your voice. Provide your children a safe haven to talk to you and ask any questions that they may have.

Exercise

The benefits of daily exercise include increased relaxation, better sleep and a more positive mood for starters.

Make an exercise plan and include the entire family. A simple chart can help kids set realistic goals and lets their excitement grow as they see progress.



If the weather is poor, swimming or exercise DVDs help kids stay moving. Also check with your local parks and recreation department for more exercise options.

Screen Time

Sometimes it's hard to face the fact that your child is in front of a screen too much because you are also glued to the television or computer. Talk with your child about what he thinks is a fair amount of time for electronic games and make a plan to keep each other accountable. "In short practice moderation (no more than two hours for all electronics total per day not counting homework) and monitor child's use of any gaming or internet connected system," says Gilboa. Remind your children there is nothing wrong with electronic games but that everyone needs to have balance in all areas of their lives.

Food Choices

Kids are smart and they know we all need to get more fruits and vegetables. If your family's goal is to reduce sugary drinks or snacks, provide fruit to munch on and place veggies and a yummy dip on the table for after school snacks. If you want your family to cut down on processed food snacks, don't bring the snack into the house.



Studies have repeatedly shown that meatless dishes are a healthy choice. A meatless dish once a week will not only help reach health goals, but can be easy on the family budget.

At non-meal times, challenge your kids to point out food commercials and discuss whether they showcase healthy or unhealthy food choices.

Make it a family affair to become healthier. Remember change is slow so take small steps and encourage your kids. Maybe they will be the ones to encourage you to get off the couch to go for a walk.