



The Wellness Family

Ada Family Chiropractic Keeps You Informed

Wellness Outdoors

Many parents look back to their childhood and can remember riding bikes down the street, playing ball with friends, or climbing trees and digging in the dirt. Where do all of those things take place? Outdoors.

Sadly, the average child today will typically spend 5 to 8 hours a day in front of a screen of some kind. Either playing video games, watching TV or movies, or focused on social media.

What happened?

The average home in the 70's and 80's had a TV with 3 primary network channels and PBS. The primary networks were CBS, ABC and NBC. Programming geared towards children was pretty much relegated to Saturday morning cartoons.

It was in 1986 that FOX first began broadcasting and in 1990 they started showing "after school TV" with cartoons and other children's programming. It was about this same time that VCRs grew popular, and Blockbuster Video opened its doors in 1985.

Of course, we can't forget video game consoles that quickly replaced arcades and gave children another excuse to never leave their homes. By the early-1980's most homes had a video game console of some kind.

Instead of spending time playing outside, children have become conditioned to being inside, in front of a screen.

The Data

Recent research suggests that, on average, an adult spends only 7% of their time outdoors. Globally, the average person spends 87% of their time indoors and 6% in their car or other transportation. Kids today are spending only 4-7 minutes outside while wasting an average of 7 ½ hours daily with some type of electronic device.

Research has shown that time outdoors in a natural environment helps fight depression while improving memory and blood pressure. Other studies have determined it improves brain function and creativity. Still other studies have shown that spending time outdoors provides many calming benefits: besides lowering blood pressure, it supports cognitive function, and increases resilience.

Several studies have proven that a child's well-being relies on time spent outdoors. Unfortunately, recess time has been cut shorter and shorter each year. Not surprising is the correlation between reduced recess time and increased rates of ADHD, depression and obesity.

According to Angela Hanscom, a pediatric occupational therapist, the average preschooler should be outside between 90 to 120 minutes a day and school-aged kids need a minimum of three hours of unstructured outdoor play – and she's not alone.



The easiest place to start is by involving outdoor time with something they already "have" to do

Aethena Enzer-Mahler, a child therapist in private practice, consults with schools about social behavioral needs and also emphasizes the importance of time spent in nature. "There's a really clear overlap between being outside and that part of your brain that develops through unstructured play," Enzer-Mahler says. "There's the opportunity to climb a tree, which utilizes executive functioning skills like motor planning, organizing, managing the physical, managing fear, concentrating, and ultimately using the skills we really want kids to naturally have when they sit and concentrate in a classroom and do schoolwork."

The Benefits of Being Outdoors

Beyond the obvious benefit of being more physically active, kids who play outside perform better in the following: creativity and imagination; critical thinking skills; and coordination and strength.

A child spending time outside in unstructured play is going to see their world through the eyes of imagination. A stick on the ground becomes a sword, or a cane, or a baseball bat. A fallen tree becomes a bridge to a make-believe world. Some old cardboard becomes a fort where friends have to know the secret password to get in.

Children left to their own devices to entertain themselves without screens or games with rules to follow perform better in math, writing and reading comprehension; and, it goes without saying that

children running, jumping and climbing in the outdoors will have more stamina, coordination and overall strength.

This is just one of the reasons why Virginia Yurich started the 1000 Hours Outside challenge and her website 1000hoursoutside.com provides recommendations and encouragement to help meet that challenge.

Plan for Your Family

While the research recommends 3 hours a day of outdoor activity, your Family Wellness Chiropractor recognizes that you have a busy family, and wants you to be successful in implementing an "outdoor plan", so focus instead on starting with just an hour a day.

Your kids already spend 6 to 8 hours in school, then if they have after-school extracurricular activities like band, sports or other school-sanctioned events, that's even less time you have available. Of course, we can't forget the average 7 hours a week spent on homework.

When considering the amount of time that is already designated for school and school-related activities, it's clear that spending time outside is not a priority and, it's likely, if your plan is to start this endeavor by cutting screen time – your kids will protest. The easiest place to start is by involving outdoor time with something they already "have" to do. For instance, homework or eating dinner.

Setting up a patio table and chairs or even throwing a blanket on the ground in the backyard as the new place to do homework is going to at least get your kids outside. While doing homework is not unstructured play, it is still getting them out of the house and into the outdoors.

This is just the first step but, consider this, how much do you think your kids would get excited about dinner being a picnic once or twice a week?

Take dinner outside and encourage your kids to sit on the ground and eat. If yours is a family that struggles with distractions during meals, this will also help with that issue as you'll have just dinner, the outdoors and each other.

Weekends Out and About

Making time outside a priority on your weekends can be a really positive change for your family. Start with just 2 hours a weekend. Either an hour each day or two hours on Saturday or Sunday, but make it a priority.

Do a quick search online for local outdoor activities such as the following:

- A botanical garden
- A nature reserve
- Local hiking trails
- Rockhounding (amateur geology)
- Off-roading with toy cars
- Play camp kitchen
- Birdwatching
- "Spell It with Sticks"

More details on these fun ideas can be found in an online Google search or by researching "outdoor activities" in online parenting magazines.

You may be surprised to find that there are a lot of places in your community that you can take your children to explore.

Remember that the goal is to get your children outside and not have it be a battle. You know your children better than anyone but if you need some ideas, ask your Family Wellness Chiropractor for recommendations.



*Dear Patient,
Ada Family Chiropractic is dedicated to providing you with the absolute best in family wellness care. So take a moment today to discuss with your Family Wellness Chiropractor any concerns you may have regarding your family's overall health and wellness.*

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