

Sixty Minutes a Day To Healthier Children

By Kathy Jablonski, Extension Educator, 4-H Youth Development

The minute your first child is born you start building family habits; you nurture and care for your children and always want the best for them. When they are small, they learn and do what their adult role models do. As the adults in the household you establish the family habits and hope your children will follow healthy lifestyles as they grow and eventually go off on their own.

In mid-May, I attended the Littleton Regional Hospital's Women's Health Conference. The keynote speaker, Dr. Joann E. Manson, Chief of the Division of Preventive Medicine and Co-Director of the Connors Center for Women's Health and Gender Biology at Brigham and Women's Hospital, Boston, gave an evocative testimony to what we intuitively know as common sense in how we eat and how we move. What's that got to do with youth development? Well, a lot. Usually, it is the female adult of the household who controls the nutrition and healthy habits of the family. Thankfully, since my days of childrearing, men are taking more active roles, and they, too, need to know how to guide and model for the children in their household when it comes to healthy lifestyle habits. A proverb I liked to quote when I was teaching child development classes was, "Teach a child the way to grow and walk some there yourself." It all starts with you.

As I sat there and listened to Dr. Manson, I jotted some notes about the findings she and her colleagues made:

Eat a balanced diet. Vary your family's diet to match the growing season and the amount of activities your family is involved with. Try some new recipes. Have the kids help make their meals. Children who help in meal preparation actually eat more of the meal that is served. Teach children how to make their favorite dishes, or ask them what new recipes they would like to try to make. The kids will learn how to cook and you may have them prepare dinner one night a week under your gentle guidance!

Eat more fruits and vegetables. Healthy New Hampshire and USDA's Food Pyramid recommend at least five servings a day. Our county abounds in fresh farm stands, farmer's markets, cooperatives and grocery stores that carry local produce. Find one (or more!) near you and try some new veggies, or fresh veggies cooked in a new way. "Sneak" some raw veggies into your day pack when you go hiking or offer them as an afternoon snack with a lowfat dip.

Move at least 30 minutes a day, and work up to one hour. Now IS the time to start...and do it as a family. Do you walk or exercise at least 30 minutes a day and at least five times a week? Studies show that even breaking up the exercise into three, 10 minute segments a day is as good. Do weight bearing exercise. Play. Work up a sweat. Make these habits last for six months and you and your family can have them for a lifetime. Summer is a super time to get the family outside to walk, hike, and play badminton, garden, play at the local playground, swim or bike ride. There are trails and parks throughout our region. Take advantage of the local Conservation Society and Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forest's efforts by enjoying their parks and trails. Find out about the local state parks and what adventures may await you. Find a new family and make friends with them while you try out a Valley Quest or other GPS adventure. Look into the low cost or free programs offered by the Science centers, national forest and other preservation associations. Movement can be walking and exploring your town's "famous" sites. Check with your local chamber of commerce to see if your town has a walking tour map you can follow. Walk the dog.

For more information about healthy eating and healthy lifestyles, check out the www.extension.unh.edu website. Follow the links to 4-H youth development's 4-H Healthy Living program, food and nutrition

pages, the Nutrition Connection program links and the links to HEAL for up to date, research based information on healthy lifestyle and nutrition.

For more information about University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension, refer to the website or call the Grafton County UNHCE office at 787-6944.