

# The Wellness Family Newsletter



Presented to you by:  
Bluewater Chiropractic Wellness Center



## Outdoor Play

*Thirty years ago the life of the average child was completely different. It wasn't uncommon to hear parents tell their kids, "Go outside and play". There were no video games and the typical TV had three channels. Then it all changed...*

### WHAT HAPPENED?

In the early 80's the first popular video game consoles were released and cable TV with cartoon channels became the norm. Suddenly, instead of just a few hours at the arcade and a couple of hours once a week watching cartoons, children had screen distractions available for multiple hours a day.

A recent study published by the American Academy of Pediatrics found that (in a sample representing four million U.S. children) nearly half of preschoolers didn't have the opportunity for parent-supervised outdoor play each day. A similar study by the Alliance for Children, a nonprofit advocacy group, revealed that, "Compared to the 1970's, children now spend 50% less time in unstructured outdoor activities. Children ages 10 to 16 now spend, on average, only 12.6 minutes per day in vigorous physical activity. Yet they spend an average of 10.4 waking hours each day relatively motionless."

A study in 2005 reported that the average child spends 44 hours per week staring at some kind of electronic screen. That is over 6 hours per day. However, a more recent study in 2013, actually said it's more like 7 hours a day (almost 50 hours per week).

### HEALTH RISKS

Increased screen time has become the norm for this generation of children, which creates serious health risks. For instance, childhood obesity in pre-adolescents has more than doubled in the past 20 years and the rate of clinically obese adolescents has tripled. Additionally, recent studies have shown there may be a link between this decreased outdoor play and increased Ritalin and antidepressant prescriptions use. Other studies have shown that children exposed to natural or outdoor settings receive benefits to their cognitive health, such as a reduction in ADHD symptoms.

### HEALTH BENEFITS

Many of the benefits are going to be obvious, such as; fresh air, more exercise, lower risk of obesity, opportunities to exercise imagination and increased social interaction. However, recent studies have actually suggested less obvious benefits like better circulation. Dutch researchers have found that kids with ADHD function better when in the woods than in a built environment. Plus, environmental education offered in schools helps students increase their critical thinking skills.

## MAKING THE CHANGE

The first step is the easiest; decrease screen time. Once the time allowed in front of a screen is limited children will have to find something else to do. One of the easiest ways to affect this change is to have children “buy” their screen time. For every hour spent in physical activity, they could earn a half hour of screen time. This will quickly and effectively cut down the amount of time spent plugged in to a computer or other electronic device.

Another important part of making this change will be finding ways to engage and entertain children. Before the advent of so much technology, children inherently knew what to do when told to “go outside and play”. So when sending children out to play be sure to provide some ideas of things they can do, or it won’t be surprising to find them just sitting outside looking bored. A quick Google search of “outdoor summer activities” or “activities for children to do outside” will provide many ideas. You can also find inspiration on Bluewater Chiropractic’s Pinterest page (link on website).

### FOR CHILDREN

Sidewalk chalk is easy to find and inexpensive but extremely useful for outside play. Not only do children love to draw on the driveway or the back patio but spraying it away in a rainbow of colors with the water hose is as much fun. For younger children, this is an easy way to help them learn to read. Draw big letters on the driveway, such as C, H, L, S, etc. The game can begin simple enough; call out the letter and the child runs to that letter. When this is no longer challenging, activities can be associated with each letter, like clap for the letter C and hop for the letter H.

Another fun game for outdoor play is to take an old sheet, place it on the lawn, and give the children some paint to paint with brushes, fingers or toes. The finished product can be hung up in the garage, or on an outside wall of the house or even used as a backdrop for some fun summer pictures. In general taking kids outside to teach them games like duck-duck-goose and freeze tag will allow them to play independently of electronic entertainment.

### FOR THE FAMILY

Outdoor activities for the family can be as elaborate as a treasure hunt and making bird feeders or as simple as a game of catch. Family outdoor activities can include skipping stones along the water, going bird watching and discussing nature (how trees make oxygen, for example). A camera is a great tool for family activities on hikes, or even in the backyard.

### FOR SENIORS

Everyone benefits from outdoor play, including elderly family members. Outdoor craft shows or flea markets can be a great way to spend the day, and many communities offer outdoor theaters or botanical gardens.

A fun idea may be to invest in a metal detector; this is a unique outdoor activity that can also be fun for both grandkids and grandparents.

In summary, we are living in a sedentary society and our children suffer because of it. Less screen time should automatically result in more activity, which is rewarding for the whole family.

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