

THE WEEKLY Herald

EDMONDS • LYNNWOOD
MOUNTLAKE TERRACE

Published: Wednesday, March 7, 2012

Parents are key role models in kids' health

YOUR HEALTH | By [Katie Murdoch](#), Herald writer



Weekly Herald/CHRIS GOODENOW Thomas Sronce (center), 19 months, of Lynnwood, chases an eight-pound exercise ball as it is passed across the floor by class participant Kim Smith (left), of Brier, and Thomas' mother Jennifer Sronce, of Lynnwood, during the Mommy and Me fitness class, Thursday, March 1, 2012 at Lynnwood Recreation Center. In the background, mothers Jenny Murphy (center-left), of Lynnwood, and Laura Storms, of Edmonds, throw their own exercise ball next to their children. Exercising around your children can encourage their own healthy behaviors and lead to healthier lifestyles.



Weekly Herald/CHRIS GOODENOW Kim Smith, of Brier, performs abdominal exercises as her son Anton, 17 months, climbs across her stomach during a "Mommy and Me" fitness class, March 1, at Lynnwood Recreation Center. Smith said her son climbing on her is a regular part of her routine. Exercising around your children can encourage their own healthy behaviors and lead to healthier lifestyles.

Adopting healthy habits starts at home.

Parents can be the greatest influence in encouraging their kids to adopt healthier lifestyles.

Allowing kids to play an active role in their health – such as helping shop for

groceries and prepare meals together – can lead to healthy habits.

Exercise can mean playing Wii fitness games at home as a family or enrolling in family-oriented classes at a municipal recreation center, such as family yoga, family swim times or dance classes.

“Learning young means you'll carry it into adulthood,” said Shannon Lind, youth programmer at the Recreation Pavilion in Mountlake Terrace.

That's not to say it's easy – at least not right away.

“It has to become a priority,” said Kelly Anderson, recreation supervisor for teens and youth programs at the Lynnwood Recreation Center.

Kids need structure, she said. They need their parents to steer them toward healthier food choices, staying active and getting enough sleep.

“A child doesn't know or have the skill set to say, ‘My body is really tired,’” she said. “It's up to the parent to set guidelines and be the parent.”

From a fitness standpoint, eating healthier and exercising is easier said than done, said Elizabeth Kovar, fitness coordinator at the Lynnwood Recreation Center.

“I most commonly experience that a youth's diet and exercise habits are influenced from home first, schools second and media third,” she said.

If a parent is struggling to learn about nutrition and break unhealthy habits, it's going to be harder for them to help their children, Kovar said. She encourages parents to consult with a fitness or nutrition professional for answers and help.

“Parents should consider themselves as that child's movie star or athlete,” she said. “Kids look up to their parents the same as they model famous people.”

Kovar recommends families aim for designated family time three times per week. Activities could range from grocery shopping and cooking together or swimming and going outdoors.

Recreation staff take their position as role models for young people seriously.

At the Lynnwood Recreation Center, staff help instill those healthy habits through

family-oriented activities like “Mommy and Me” fitness classes and “Zumba for Friends-n-Family,” to special events like “Get Moving” and talking about adopting a diet filled with fruits and vegetables.

In Edmonds, staff is offering youths a 10-week Crossfit Camp led by two coaches who will teach 10- to 14-year-olds how to do Crossfit routines safely and how to eat healthy. Coaches Stephen Hitt and Molly Hunsinger have a level of understanding as they've been through diet and exercise changes.

Parents may not know what to feed their children, Hitt said. Or they're carrying on a cycle of what they were fed or what their culture supports. One common practice is telling children to eat all of their potatoes and vegetables before dessert, without realizing they're loading up on carbohydrates, he said.

“People love their food. It's deeply rooted in how they live their lives,” he said.

Hunsinger agreed: “It's very sensitive; you may as well be talking about religion and politics especially when you talk about really big changes.”

Common pitfalls for parents are labels that say “organic,” “low-fat” and “natural” which don't necessarily promise to be good for you, she said.

Recreation staff offer healthy snacks and push drinking water instead of overloading on juice and soda.

“It's valuable to have staff get in and do activities,” Lind said.