

YMCA
HEALTHY KIDS DAY[®]
is Every Day

WHAT EVERY PARENT CAN DO



YMCA

We build strong kids,
strong families, strong communities.



HELP YOUR CHILD LEARN A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE

Raising healthy kids is every parent's goal. You want the best for them. Being healthy means lots of things—growing up strong and fit; making connections and developing positive relationships with others; learning to be responsible, self-reliant and able to make good decisions.

That's a tall order for any parent. But don't forget, you have lots of help in the community—your child's school, your church, your park district, your public library, your children's museum and, of course, your YMCA.

This brochure was designed to answer some common parent questions and to help you develop your own ideas and plans for raising healthy kids. It covers some of the basics and includes some idea-starters for things you can add to your child's environment at home—the very best place to start learning.

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Q. I want my child to use afterschool hours well. What's the best activity?

A. There's no one good answer to that question—there are many. The first priority for many kids and their families is homework. Along with doing homework, keep in mind that afterschool hours are prime time for getting adequate amounts of physical activity—at least 60 minutes a day is recommended. In fact, many recommend either structured or unstructured play immediately after school, which helps kids then focus on homework assignments. With that as a starting point, think about balance rather than a single afterschool activity. Maybe a team sport some days, an arts activity or class on others. But the most important thing to remember is that all these activities have something to offer your child. Sports are great for building a healthy and strong body, and playing on a team is the perfect way to learn responsibility and just plain teamwork. Arts of almost any kind—music, theater, drawing, crafts—provide a healthy and positive outlet for self-expression. And organized programs can help develop interpersonal skills, build a community connection early on and teach kids how to care for others. Many Ys have excellent afterschool programs that can help your child do better in school, provide plenty of physical activity and foster relationships with other youth and adults.

PARENTS' TIP

Sit down with your children and discuss the options for afterschool activities. Ask what sounds the most interesting and fun. Encourage them to try things, but let them know that if an activity isn't a good fit, you'll help choose another.

Q. What about watching television and using the computer—either games or the Internet. Are these good or bad free time activities?

A. There's no doubt about it, television and computers are a part of our culture. Some of the experts on kids, the American Academy of Pediatrics, suggest limiting the amount of time spent with electronic media. Many children will spend tens of thousands of hours watching TV, movies, videos, playing computer and video games, surfing the Internet—all before reaching middle school age. While these are important sources of information and teach our kids about the world they live in, experts also point out that parents need to be involved in their kids viewing, playing and listening habits. One suggestion is to keep TVs and computers in family areas of your home rather than in kids' rooms. That way you can be aware of what they're watching and who they may be "talking" to on the Internet. Another important tool for parents is the rating system that has been used for movies for a long time, but is now being applied to TV shows, video and computer games and music. For more information on those ratings, visit the American Academy of Pediatrics Web site at www.aap.org/family/ratingsgame.htm.

PARENTS' TIP

It's a good idea to limit the time your children watch TV or surf the Internet each day. Most experts recommend no more than one or two hours a day. Talk to your children about these limits and suggest other activities such as reading, sports or other activities with family, neighbors and friends.

Q. I'm worried that my child may be or become overweight. What's the best way to address this?

A. The Chronic Disease Directors tell us that many people—parents and children—are frequently overwhelmed by recommendations that require immediate lifestyle changes when it comes to maintaining a healthy weight. Instead, small steps toward small victories in nutrition and physical activity give tangible goals and hope for success. For example, losing just 5-10% of body weight can substantially improve health. It's also important to work with your child's doctor to assess whether he or she needs to lose weight and then develop a plan that can promote success.

Children will model their parents' behavior and overweight children enjoy activities where the emphasis isn't on them or their weight. Take part in family-friendly activities at your YMCA—walk on treadmills side by side, learn how to play a new sport like racquetball, or experience a yoga or water exercise class together.

PARENTS' TIP

It is important to let your child know he or she is loved and appreciated whatever his or her weight. An overweight child probably knows better than anyone that he or she is overweight. All children need support, acceptance and encouragement from their parents and other concerned adults. The American Public Health Association suggests one simple thing you can do to help manage weight: start your child on a habit of walking or biking to school. Exercise doesn't have to be structured or programmed, and when kids become accustomed to an active lifestyle, their health improves on all fronts.

Q. I know what my child eats is important, but which foods are best for growth and health?

A. Again, there's no one answer. Instead, think about balance, variety and moderation. Everyone needs a good balance of all the food groups, especially fruits, vegetables and whole grains. Encourage your child to try new foods, remembering that it may take more than one trial before he or she likes a new flavor or texture. Don't give up. Something your child didn't like when very young may be appealing in teen years. And, no matter what your child's age, providing choices is important.

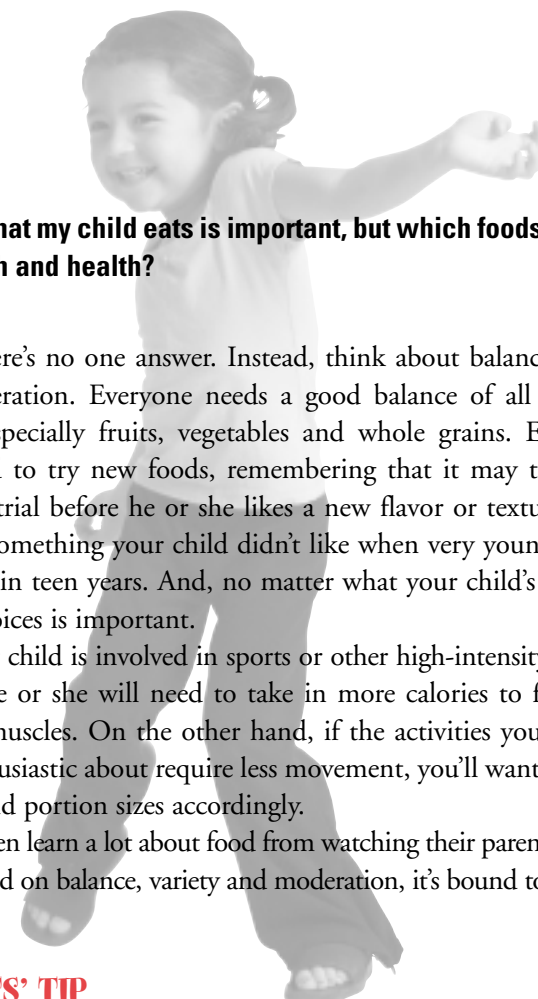
If your child is involved in sports or other high-intensity physical activity, he or she will need to take in more calories to fuel those growing muscles. On the other hand, if the activities your child is most enthusiastic about require less movement, you'll want to adjust calories and portion sizes accordingly.

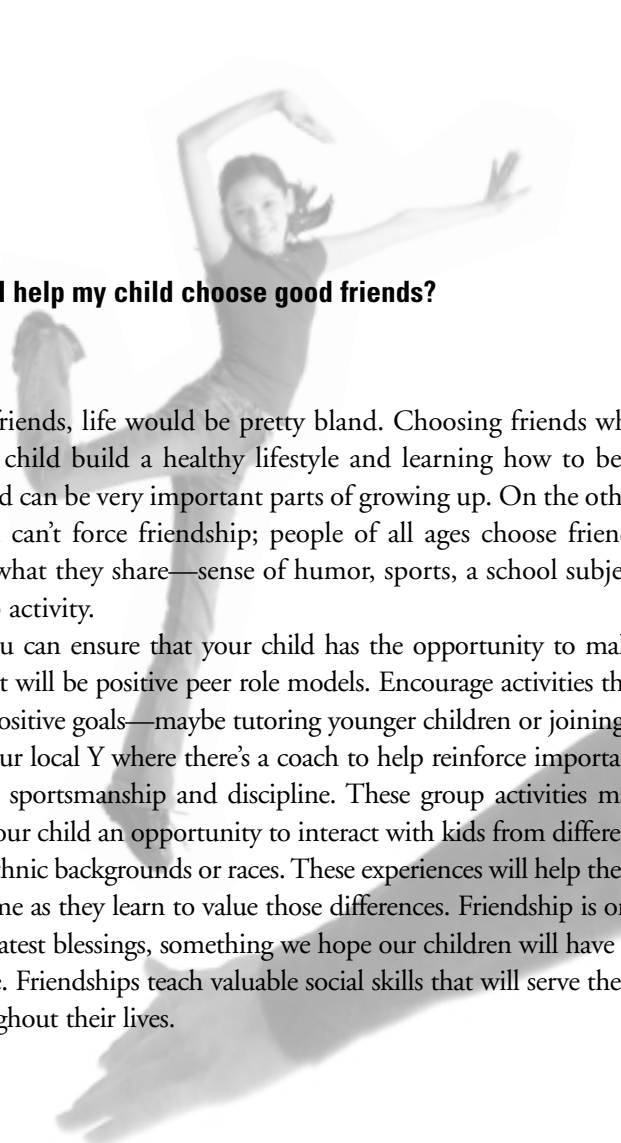
Children learn a lot about food from watching their parents. If your diet is based on balance, variety and moderation, it's bound to rub off.

PARENTS' TIP

Get the kids involved in preparing meals; they'll not only learn to cook, but they'll be better equipped to make good nutrition choices. And don't forget, the breakfast or dinner table provides an opportunity to keep the lines of communication open.

The American Cancer Society, the American Diabetes Association and the American Heart Association have collaborated to create a program called Everyday Choices For A Healthier Lifestyle. Their Web site, www.everydaychoices.org, is full of tips and suggestions to start kids—and parents—on simple changes you can make.





Q. How can I help my child choose good friends?

A. Without friends, life would be pretty bland. Choosing friends who help your child build a healthy lifestyle and learning how to be a good friend can be very important parts of growing up. On the other hand, you can't force friendship; people of all ages choose friends based on what they share—sense of humor, sports, a school subject or a group activity.

But you can ensure that your child has the opportunity to make friends that will be positive peer role models. Encourage activities that focus on positive goals—maybe tutoring younger children or joining a team at your local Y where there's a coach to help reinforce important things like sportsmanship and discipline. These group activities may also give your child an opportunity to interact with kids from different cultures, ethnic backgrounds or races. These experiences will help them for a lifetime as they learn to value those differences. Friendship is one of life's greatest blessings, something we hope our children will have in abundance. Friendships teach valuable social skills that will serve them well throughout their lives.

PARENTS' TIP

Encourage your children to bring friends home and make your home a welcoming place for them. Get to know your kids' friends and the parents and guardians of the friends. Communication among parents sets a good example for kids and models peaceful conflict resolution. When children see how we value our own friendships, it helps them see how friends help each other work through problems together.

Q. I know that bullying happens a lot and can have a major impact on kids. How can I tell if my child is being bullied?

A. First, it's important to understand what bullying is. It can be psychological and emotional (spreading rumors or excluding others from conversations or activities); verbal (name-calling or threats) or physical (hitting or pushing).

Next, it's important to recognize signals that your child may be the victim of bullying. These can include avoiding certain situations, people or places; pretending to be sick in order to avoid going to school or community programs; behavior changes such as being withdrawn and passive or overly active or aggressive; frequent crying; or signs of injuries. If you suspect bullying, talk to your child about what is bothering him or her. It may be bullying or some other problem at school or in the neighborhood. But in either case, teach your child to report bullying to a teacher, other adult leader or to you so that proper steps can be taken.

PARENTS' TIP

It's important to respond in a positive way and to be accepting if your child reports bullying. Let your child know it's not his or her fault and that telling you was the right thing to do. Ask what he or she thinks should be done. Talk about what's already been tried, what worked and what didn't. Don't encourage your child to fight back. And seek help from youth development experts such as a teacher, school guidance counselor, YMCA staff or other community youth leaders. Reinforcing values such as the ones promoted by the YMCA character development program—caring, honesty, respect and responsibility—is one way to offset bullying. You can also talk to school administrators about starting SAVE (Stop America's Violence Everywhere), a program sponsored by the American Medical Association Alliance. Or visit their Web site at www.ama-assn.org/go/alliance for tips about how to control bullying.



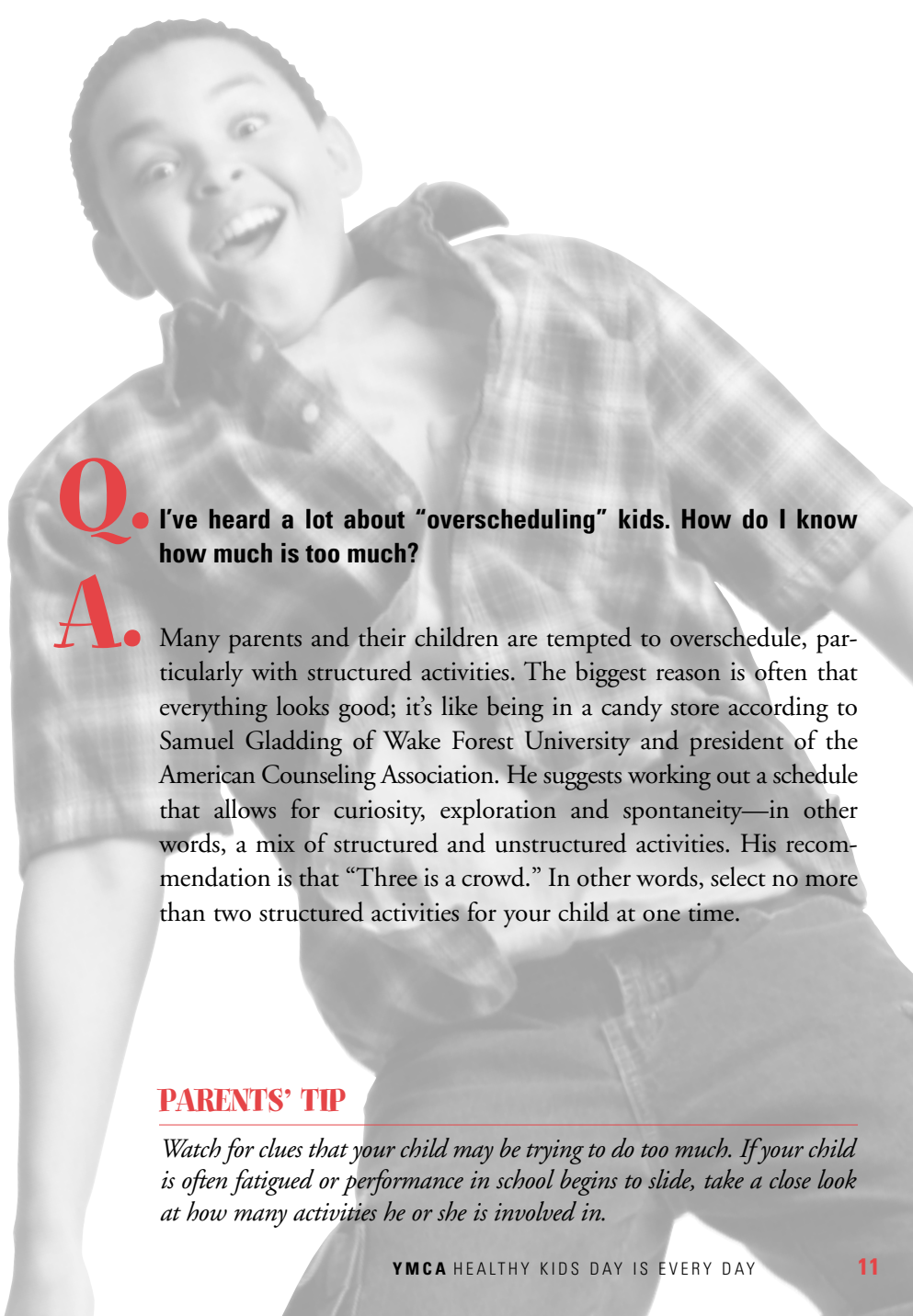
Q. Is music—or any art form for that matter—a “nice to have” or a “must have” for my child?

A. Taking part in just about any form of art provides children with an outlet for self-expression and a way to address frustrations or low self-esteem. Experts also tell us the arts train their brains for higher forms of thinking. In fact, a study at the University of California, Irvine showed that kids who took piano lessons and sang in a chorus scored 80% higher in solving puzzles, demonstrating their increased ability to visualize the world accurately. Other studies have shown that arts education helps children learn conflict resolution skills.

Like anything else, it’s important to find out where their interests are as well as their talent. Not everybody can be a singer or dancer, actor, writer or painter. But appreciating and learning about these art forms can be available to any child. So the answer is closer to “must have” than “nice to have.”

PARENTS’ TIP

Arts education doesn’t have to cost a lot. Check out your local YMCA, other community organizations, or ask your child’s school or Sunday school teacher whether there is a painting, chorus, theater group or other arts program in which he or she can participate. If your Y doesn’t have an arts program, why not volunteer to help get one started? Ask your child to get involved and help, too. This way, you not only get the benefits of an arts experience, but you and your child can work together on a very positive activity.

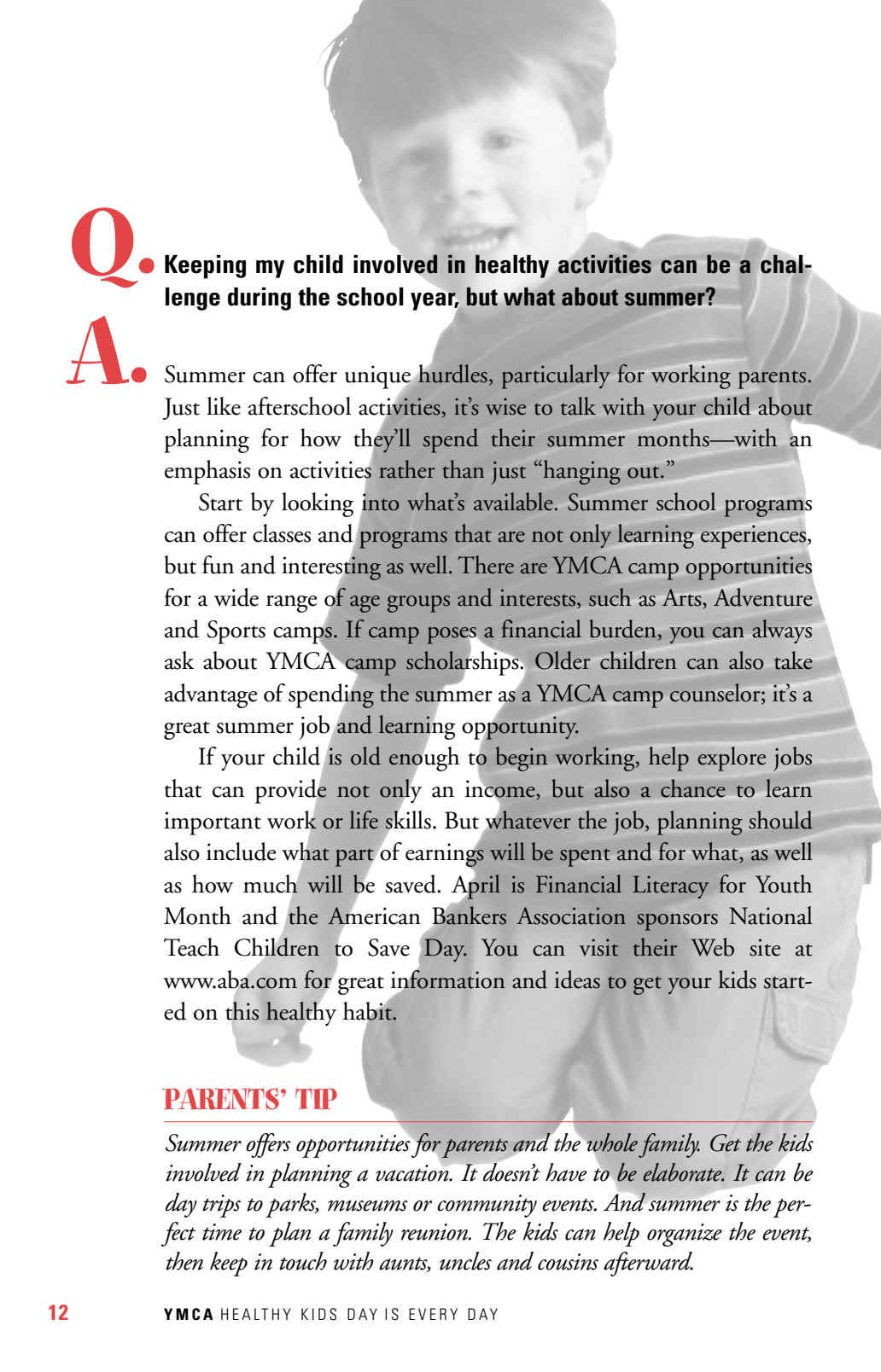


Q. I’ve heard a lot about “overscheduling” kids. How do I know how much is too much?

A. Many parents and their children are tempted to overschedule, particularly with structured activities. The biggest reason is often that everything looks good; it’s like being in a candy store according to Samuel Gladding of Wake Forest University and president of the American Counseling Association. He suggests working out a schedule that allows for curiosity, exploration and spontaneity—in other words, a mix of structured and unstructured activities. His recommendation is that “Three is a crowd.” In other words, select no more than two structured activities for your child at one time.

PARENTS’ TIP

Watch for clues that your child may be trying to do too much. If your child is often fatigued or performance in school begins to slide, take a close look at how many activities he or she is involved in.



Q. Keeping my child involved in healthy activities can be a challenge during the school year, but what about summer?

A. Summer can offer unique hurdles, particularly for working parents. Just like afterschool activities, it's wise to talk with your child about planning for how they'll spend their summer months—with an emphasis on activities rather than just “hanging out.”

Start by looking into what's available. Summer school programs can offer classes and programs that are not only learning experiences, but fun and interesting as well. There are YMCA camp opportunities for a wide range of age groups and interests, such as Arts, Adventure and Sports camps. If camp poses a financial burden, you can always ask about YMCA camp scholarships. Older children can also take advantage of spending the summer as a YMCA camp counselor; it's a great summer job and learning opportunity.

If your child is old enough to begin working, help explore jobs that can provide not only an income, but also a chance to learn important work or life skills. But whatever the job, planning should also include what part of earnings will be spent and for what, as well as how much will be saved. April is Financial Literacy for Youth Month and the American Bankers Association sponsors National Teach Children to Save Day. You can visit their Web site at www.aba.com for great information and ideas to get your kids started on this healthy habit.

PARENTS' TIP

Summer offers opportunities for parents and the whole family. Get the kids involved in planning a vacation. It doesn't have to be elaborate. It can be day trips to parks, museums or community events. And summer is the perfect time to plan a family reunion. The kids can help organize the event, then keep in touch with aunts, uncles and cousins afterward.

HAVE OTHER QUESTIONS?

These are just some of the questions parents ask most frequently. You're sure to have others. There's always someone you can talk to at the YMCA who can provide the advice or answers you need. It's our goal to build strong kids, strong families and strong communities.

YMCA Healthy Kids Day® supporting organizations are also great resources to find answers about healthy living. These organizations and their Web sites are listed below:

American Cancer Society
www.cancer.org

American Diabetes Association
www.diabetes.org

American Heart Association
www.heart.org

American Public Health Association
www.apha.org

Chronic Disease Directors
www.chronicdisease.org

TO FIND YOUR NEAREST YMCA OFFERING ACTIVITIES FOR YOUR CHILD AND FAMILY, AND TO DOWNLOAD ADDITIONAL COPIES OF THIS BROCHURE, VISIT WWW.YMCA.NET.



The Kimberly-Clark Corporation—a company dedicated to enhancing the health, hygiene and the well-being of people every day, everywhere—continues to generously underwrite YMCA programs designed to support and strengthen families, including YMCA Healthy Kids Day® and the YMCA Activate America initiative. Activate America is a long-term plan focused on developing and implementing community-based solutions to help improve the health of all Americans. YMCA of the USA salutes Kimberly-Clark for helping YMCAs build strong kids, families and communities.



One of the world's largest producers and marketers of branded fruit juices, Tropicana Products, Inc., a unit of PepsiCo, Inc., is helping YMCAs build strong kids in spirit, mind and body through its long-term support of YMCA Healthy Kids Day® and other youth initiatives. Through Tropicana's support, YMCAs are bringing kids and their families together to learn about good nutrition habits, fitness and how to be healthier in all aspects of their lives. YMCA of the USA sincerely thanks Tropicana for its ongoing support of positive and enriching YMCA youth and teen development programs.



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