



## **The Benefits of Exercise These School Holidays**

With the school holidays coming up, the weather improving, and the days getting longer, there are plenty of opportunities for children to get outside and active. This activity also means they eat and sleep better, burn up excess energy, as well as being a chance for families to get moving together.

However, despite the opportunities there is plenty of evidence that children aren't moving as much as they used to and as a result, as a nation, we are facing a generation of less active and less healthy children. The NZ Ministry of Health reports that 31% of children aged 2-14 years are overweight, and this trend has been on the rise in recent years. Internationally, the World Health Organisation reports that 42 million children under the age of 5 are overweight (2013 data).

Getting kids active helps them with their physical development including building strong bones, muscles and joints, and a healthy heart and lungs. It also improves their balance, coordination and cognitive skills, and it will help them be more confident and socially interactive.

And the benefits aren't just physical. Researchers from the University of Granada have proven that physical activity levels in children may affect their brain structure, which in turn may have an influence on their academic performance. The researchers have confirmed that physical activity levels in children (especially aerobic capacity and motor ability) is associated with a greater volume of gray matter in several cortical and subcortical brain regions.

While physical activity and childhood goes together, more and more there is competition for getting active. Nearly half of children aged 5-14 years (53%) usually watch two or more hours of television a day, and this time increases into the teen years. This means we cannot just assume children will stay active. Just as we plan time to exercise and engage in physical activity ourselves, we need to make sure this happens for our children as well.

So let's get our nation's children active. There are plenty of ways you can integrate activity into family life with young children. These include:

- Limiting screen time as much as possible
- Whenever possible use active transport options
- Involve your children in your activity and exercise choices. While it may not be appropriate to take your pre-schooler to the gym, they can come along for active family activities.
- Get the children to help around the house and garden, and teach them that working up a sweat is a positive thing.

Once children head into their teenage years and beyond, there's no reason they can't enjoy exercise in the way we do. While children who already enjoy sport and exercise will likely continue to be active, those who prefer to work at their own pace, or may need a little more encouragement, most exercise facilities and registered trainers offer student package options which means you can set your teenager up with safe and supported exercise advice.

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### Contact details for further information about the exercise industry:

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**NZ Register of Exercise Professionals (REPs)** - Independent not for profit quality mark of exercise professionals and facilities. Using REPs Registered Exercise Professionals is the "warrant of fitness check" that exercise professionals and facilities meet New Zealand and internationally benchmarked standards to deliver safe exercise advice and instruction. REPs is affiliated globally to other national exercise professional registers representing over 210,000 exercise professionals through the International Confederation of Registers for Exercise Professionals (ICREPs) - [www.icreps.org](http://www.icreps.org)

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**Exercise Association of New Zealand** - Not for profit exercise industry representative organisation. Its *mission is to proactively support a sustainable exercise and fitness industry in New Zealand by growing participation in structured exercise through advocacy, information and industry standards.*

