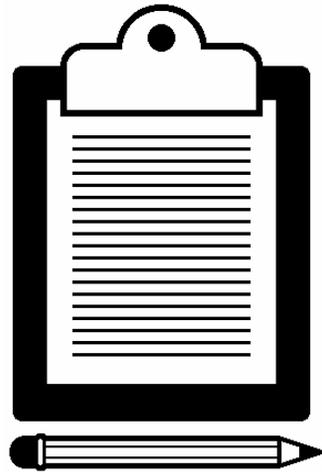


TEACHING PHYSICAL EDUCATION AT HOME



By
K.C. Swanson

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K.C. has a heart for the whole family, spiritually and physically. She has been involved in both church and community programs involving children and was a consultant for Learner's Educational Books.

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FALLING IN THE MIDDLE

Sharon Lewis has 3 children whom she homeschools. Yesterday was the third day in a row that she had slept fitfully, awakening at 4:30 a.m. She finally fell back asleep at 7:15 only to awaken at 8:00 to find her three children had helped themselves to breakfast. Cheerios now greeted her bare feet at every step and the milk was spilled all over the table. The television was screaming about Barbie's latest "Glitter Palace" and her four year old daughter was pulling on her robe begging for a "Californ'rolla'baby" . The boys, 6 and 9, were actively engaged in a war over Grandpa's latest "little something" -- a battery powered squirt gun which both had been forbidden to even bring inside the house. "Another happy day" Sharon told herself, exhausted, and wondered again if she should start sending them down the street to the local school. By 11:00 school had started and some semblance of order had descended, but they were only a portion through the language arts section of the curriculum and math, history and science had not even begun. "At this rate," Sharon thought, "we won't even get out of the house today."

We've all had moments during our schooling where the thought of adding another subject, such as physical education, to our schedule strikes fear in our heart. Kristen Scott, another homeschooling mother of two, began homeschooling her older girl, Angie, because she wanted to give her daughter a more Biblical foundation of morals she saw were completely absent in the local school district. A sexual "bill of rights" was available to any student in Jr. High, but a posting of the Ten Commandments was completely inappropriate. Kristen carefully monitors both television and neighborhood friends for Angie, and is careful of peer pressure to conform to any outside issues, such as what clothes or shoes to wear in order to be "cool", even at church. Kristen has a firm conviction to teach her girls to be not "of the world" even though they live "in the world."

Both of these mothers are composites of parents who homeschool. Most of us probably fall somewhere in the middle, and the thought of another expectation on our time and teaching is not only unwelcome, it's downright scary. Yet we must walk the line to prepare our kids for a world where Nintendo games grant "points" to strip a car and real kids are mugged for their Reeboks. What is important is "how you look" not "who you are" and most of us are doing our level best to balance God's expectations over society's.

We live in a world obsessed with the physical body. In the last decade the physical fitness boom has taken off at an outstanding rate...new advances are taking place on a daily basis. In every movie, in every TV commercial the body is worshiped and adored - and the less covered, the better. Kids even as young as 6 and 7 talk about dieting, getting in shape and whether or not they have the right "look" to be accepted. We do indeed look upon the outward appearance, and more so than ever before it seems. And God still looks upon the heart. But does God care what He finds in our outward appearance? Does it please Him when we take care of our body, or should we shun the world's preoccupation with the physical in our efforts to be separate with the world?

SUBDUE THE EARTH, POTLUCK ON SUNDAY

It is true; the overwhelming topic of the Bible is man's spiritual condition and God's solution to that condition. Yet in His very first moment of creating man, God did something to us that define our daily existence until eternity, He breathed into Adam's nostrils and man became a living being. So moment by moment, day by day we exist in a physical body unable to live without that first act of God in human history - we breathe. I have been in some churches however; that as you look around the room, just breathing must be difficult for some of God's children. In eschewing the "way of the world" some Christians have forgotten that God first gave us a body, and told us to fill and subdue the earth - creation - and part of that creation includes ourselves.

"Subduing" our bodies is not what many of us think about in caring for our earth (Gen. 1:28). Given that in most of our circles, we don't smoke, drink or do drugs, Christians eat. At every social gathering, at every meeting, at any special occasion and certainly at every opportunity, we eat. Now I like to eat as much as anyone. In fact, that was precisely the reason I began my study of physical fitness, but I am constantly amazed at how often food is the center of attraction in our churches. Did God breathe in Adam's nostrils and then say go and do whatever? Of course not! Much of the Mosaic law centers around things physical - what to eat, what to touch, when to rest, how to plant - God did not simply say to us just think about the spiritual things and please pass the salt.

There is basis for taking care of the physical body in Scripture. God does not place the emphasis on it that our present culture does, to be sure, yet He never ignored our temporal reality, and in fact brings it to our attention in a variety of ways. There is very little mention of Jesus' life between birth and the beginning of his ministry except what we read in Luke 2. Yet God saw to it that Luke included ..."Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and men." (vs. 52). The physical growth and development of our Savior was worthy of inclusion to Luke the physician, and though no gospel writer gives us the physical description of the man, Jesus, it is a logical assumption that he was physically capable to conduct a three year ministry where he traveled from place to place, on foot, going about His Father's business. Some of us today wouldn't dream of going around the block without driving the car (and we look it). In Luke, the emphasis is not on the physical, but God places it as prerequisite to His plan.

Perhaps the people of Biblical times did not emphasize the physical simply because it was so integral to their very existence. The sheep didn't look after themselves, the fields weren't cared for by automation, the households were not run by appliances - everything took physical labor of some kind and everybody knew that. Thus, when Paul exhorted Timothy to study scripture, he used the example of physical training (calling it of "some value", I Tim 4:8) as something to pattern himself after -- regular physical training for a task. Paul also used the example of the church as being Christ's body (I Cor. 12). It is inherent in his example that the body be fit and work well for the word picture to work at all. Imagine the "body of Christ" as a fat, huffing body straining to go one flight of stairs. The illustration just doesn't work. Paul, also calls the body "temple of the Holy Spirit" and tells the believers to "honor" that body (I Cor 3:16,6:19).

Early Gentile Christians may not have been as fanatical about the Temple as Jewish Christians would have been, but its importance would not have been lost on them. God expects us to use the creation he has given us with respect - especially since He happens to have made that His home.

OUR KIDS, OURSELVES

So what has this to do with Home School? How many times have we been reminded to "train up a child in the way he should go"? How many times have we been exhorted to not only tell our children what they should do, but model it for them? In the state of California, we are expected to include physical education in a course of study. Yet we are left with an expectation we may be unable to fill unless this is also a part of our own lives. When we teach and encourage our children to read, we do it not because it is expected by the State, we do it because we know how valuable it is for our children. We know that as adults who read, their learning will never cease and the world will never become boring to them. So in spite of their little selves, we set reading before them as an expectation, in hopes that it will become a joy. But if they never see us sitting down to enjoy a good book nor poring over an enlightening article, do we suppose that they will become adamant readers as adults? In the same way, I propose that if they never see us care for our bodies (and not just by bathing!) all the expectation and encouraging in the world will not be effective in the long run.

So what's the big deal? Maybe you are not overweight, but don't exercise more than chasing your toddler from chair to chair. Isn't that enough? As I have already stated, people in the biblical times, and indeed, in every century just about until this one have been active just by virtue of surviving. Yet in the 20th century, we have figured out that machines can do it better and faster, and most "work" is done from behind a desk. I know, I know, I'm a mother too, but vacuuming the rug just doesn't compare to hand plowing a field, chopping wood, milking the cows, and churning the butter -- all before breakfast. Along with every other invention in modern times, we have had to invent exercise. Even if you fall into bed every night exhausted, everyone can benefit from this invention.

So what do we need exercise for, anyway? Let me answer that from a "good news, bad news" perspective. First, the bad news (get it over with): A little more than a decade ago, the surgeon general released a report stating that modern man suffers from plagues such as cancer, diabetes, emphysema, asthma, bronchitis, cirrhosis and that more than one-third of us are obese (20% above normal weight).

Since that time, more than these diseases have arisen in our society that connects directly to the lack of respect of God and his creation. In spite of the fact our culture worships the body, it also sacrifices that body on the altar of self, and people are dying because of it. In teaching our children about God and His plan for us, a balanced education includes education in what can happen if we don't treat our bodies with care.

We teach our children about a world gone mad with drugs alcohol and sex outside of marriage and tell them what not to do, but cannot leave a void and forget to tell them what to do.

THIRD PERIOD GYM

So what's the good news? When I was a kid, I went to the public schools, and there my parents had reasonable assumptions that I would be receiving my "due" of physical education. Most of it was informal. Every hour or two, the class would let out for recess or lunch. At that time, most of us would participate in some sort of game or activity. Then as I got older, I had a daily PE class where the more agile kids divided from the less agile in a pecking order called choosing sides. Various games were played, rules learned and it was left to that. Whether that was enough or even worth the time, I don't know, I did enjoy the games usually, and at least was not the last to be picked for a team.

But I was never really "in shape". Mostly, I pushed the top end of my weight zone (or went over it) and began to do a lot of destructive things to my body as I reached adulthood. I could have easily become one of those Surgeon General statistics. But I discovered regular exercise when my first child was about 4 months old. I video taped a TV exercise program and remember barely making it through it. Done everyday though, I began to notice the benefits very soon. Even if my baby wasn't yet sleeping through the night, I was sleeping better, and everyday I felt stronger and just more in balance.

I now walk two miles in a half hour, enjoy bike riding and rollerblading with my kids, swim sometimes for variety and go to a gym at least 2-3 times per week. Looking at me you would not see the world's greatest athlete or runner-up for Ms. Fitness, but you would see a healthy person. I feel good, I am rarely sick and my husband doesn't call a buddy to help move the furniture, he just calls "Honey!" It feels good to be strong.

ALL THE COMFORT OF HOME

Today, my children are in home school. We have no recess, no gym floor, no huge field and certainly not enough students for more than a game of singles tennis -- but we have no court. The advantages of group schools are in the group and the budget. Structured programs, football and baseball teams, even gym equipment is part of the curriculum (unless it hasn't been cut by the state). But the reasons to keep on home schooling still outweigh the reasons for group enterprise learning, and this applies to the P.E. class as well. The more kinesthetically gifted children may benefit from an intramural program such as seen on bigger campuses, but chances are, the parents of those kids haven't been sitting around and definitely don't need to be told that. For most of us, our home school can turn into a very good place for nurturing the physical education of our kids, but we need to steer clear of the pitfalls. I love the Nike admonition to "Just Do It". A few years ago, I was a personal trainer. I heard every and any excuse you can imagine as to why my clients couldn't do what I asked. I was training mostly mothers with young children, so I know the whole mom's excuse list by heart. Yes, my yard is small, too. In fact, I'll bet my yard is smaller than most yards of any who read this. But bear with me, there are solutions.

I think one of the easiest pitfalls is the one that sneaks up on you. One of the best advantages of going to a gym over having the equipment in your den or garage is just the fact of getting up and going. Home is the place where we rest. Over there is the couch, the bed is just in there and we just love our favorite chair. The entire make up of home is "soft" - carpets, pillows, blankets, warm

cuddlies. This is antithetical to get up and go. We eat here, we relax here after a long day and put a TV on and presto - a couch potato is born. But we also learn at home too, something I at least didn't comprehend for my kids until a few years ago. It wasn't a place where school could happen, but it has grown to become the best place for that, and it can accommodate one more facet, too, that of becoming the place to get fit.

STARTING THE RACE

I have found that if the smallness of my home doesn't always accommodate a given activity, I can find a way or a place that can. This year my son and I began to ride bikes together during the time the rest of the neighborhood was in school. Before I took him out of that school, most of our afternoon and evening was devoted to the mandatory "homework" and sometimes this just made an outside activity impossible. Now however, he has been involved in a gymnastics program that would easily excel any program offered through his former school. Neither can I overlook the benefits that people have been reaping for centuries before it was fashionable to send our kids off to an institution. Every day chores count when it comes to fitness, and though I would not base a program completely on this (unless you live on a farm) there are things such as sweeping floors and sidewalks, raking leaves and yard care that are at least equal to an elementary recess and the yard gets clean too.

Home schooled kids often beat other kids just in the abilities around the house, and this is not just sitting around. Count it, for their sakes, as part of their learning. This is where you can become involved in the modeling aspect as well. Go a little further and take a walk between math and reading. Learn to have fun with your kids on a bike. Rollerskate in the park. Remember, the park is practically free of people and the equipment matches what ever is on the public school playground, especially if you bring a large soft ball to bounce. When was the last time you sat on a swing? If your self-consciousness won't let you swing or tackle the jungle gym, ask yourself, "who the heck cares what the park personnel think?" (Just tell them you've been released from an institution....California Public Schools.) The park can become an area of physical testing for your child too, "how many times can you run this field and then climb over this slide in five minutes?" A little imagination and you'll be making up games like a pro. Go to the library and find shelves of games on jump rope, games on what to play with a ball and a hoola-hoop, skating and running technique. Play softball and kickball as a family - kids don't care if it is formal play...in fact some kids stuck in Little League may wish for fewer expectations. Just the way we can no longer turn our child loose in the classroom and expect him to return with his multiplication tables memorized, we must take responsibility for the part of his education called physical education. And as we desire to merely open the door on the world of learning for her to begin to explore it her own way, we open the door to physical fitness freedom and joy.

BASIC SKILLS AND BEYOND

But just what should we expect? Not every girl will be like Mary Lou Retton, competing at Olympic levels before she is 14. We don't expect them to reach Einstein proportions in academics either, but we have a basic idea of where they should be for their ages. By the ages of 7 - 9, most kids should be close to achieving the following skills:

- jumping jacks
- jump feet together 40 inches
- jump up and grab object 6 inches above highest reach
- jump over ropes held at increasingly higher levels
- jump up and turn around before landing
- jump or hop in a pattern?
- throw a ball 25 ft (girls) or 45 ft (boys)
- throw and roll balls to hit a target
- dribble a basketball or soccer ball
- hit a ball with a bat
- throw and catch a frisbee
- copy simple dance steps
- run on all fours
- enter a spinning jump rope, jump and exit
- walk a low balance beam, pivot and balance one leg¹

These are some of the skills that most kids this age can master. There are many more, and some skills will be picked up faster than others. My four year old boy rode a two wheel bicycle without training wheels, but he still can barely jump a rope at 8. He can hit a ball for a base hit but couldn't follow a dance step on the tenth try. Some skills are those one child will desire and while another scoffs. Don't feel "list envy" and push to achieve every skill. At the end of this article are reference books to help you define what is the most important for your family. A family with a pool for instance will probably decide that swimming is a foremost skill to acquire, while another living in the mountains defines hiking and survival skills as foremost.

There are a variety of levels of involvement to fitness, and though no one should do as little as possible, you do not need to sign up for every team and sport offered in the recreation booklet available at city hall. Team sports are not the only acceptable avenue for skills, as already mentioned.

Individual sports, informal and competitive are as near as your front door. Bike riding (as a family is really fun), swimming, tree climbing, jumping rope, skating, swinging, walking and jogging, climbing on monkey bars, hopscotch, homemade obstacle courses, push ups, sit ups and pull ups at home or in the park are all choices that can be done almost anytime. I've met few kids at a loss as to what to do when presented with a playground. Informal family games or with a few friends include tetherball, catch, handball (got a wall?) kickball, frisbee or sandlot baseball, foursquare, Simon says, Follow the Leader, Red Light/Green Light, Mother May I...is your memory beginning to hum?

Studies have shown that given the choice to pace themselves children will often run, then

¹Sonlight Teacher's Curriculum, Grade 3, page 140

rest, run some more, then rest again equaling a complex workout known to researchers as Interval Training. But the kids don't know that, they're only doing what comes naturally. My four year old often makes hopping a game -- she doesn't walk from place to place but only hops. When I'm late for an appointment, this game can irritate me -- why can't she just move from place to place like an adult? But that's the whole point. She is not an adult and she moves like a child -- at varying speeds.

As a child gets older more formal instruction can be introduced. Again, the library is a resource overlooked in the non-academic world of fitness. A few months ago, my son was participating in a "Basics Meet" in gymnastics - a skill test of sorts to establish whether or not a child is ready to move on to the next level in instruction. Two boys, whom I had never seen before, participated... and they won 1st and 2nd place by a knock out! The coach then announced they had only been attending the gym for a few weeks (compared to most boys' 1-2 years). Not only that, but they had never been instructed in any other gym. It turns out that the boys' father had gotten a book on gymnastics and taught the boys basic floor moves at home. A few short months later and they were competing at regional levels. Now the point is not that you must go get a book and your child prodigy will bring home the gold.

The point is rather that the basics steps of instruction were available to these boys for the price of a library card. When I first began to lift weights I devoured books on technique, and I still know more than the average Joe who hits the gym 3 days a week. Weight training is a sport that can be the foundation to any other sport, or a sport in and of itself. With proper guidelines, a child as young as 7 can be introduced to lifting small weights in a balanced program 2-3 times weekly, but needs to be supervised very closely. Without knowledge or proper coaching a child can hurt himself very easily, so knowing what you're doing in this case is vital. According to Steven J. Fleck of the US Olympic Training Center in Colorado, if two children are growing muscle normally at the same rate the trained child may have a competitive edge - "It's not a matter of development, it's a matter of learning to use what you have."² The drawback with weight training is that it can be boring and the goal is to have fun at the early stages. Many children do find the equipment fascinating but need to be supervised closely or severe injury can result!

As mentioned earlier, gymnastics is a good beginning for children as young as three whose attention span is longer than a Sesame Street segment. Older children enjoy martial arts (be careful of those that stress the religious aspect of the discipline rather than just teach a sport). Golf, dancing, horse-back riding, skating, skiing, track sports and the triathlon sports of biking, swimming and running are all individual sports from which instruction can be more structured as a child matures.

Formal team sports in which so many kids are involved today can foster the same imbalance that our society can in its quest for the perfect body. As many have noted, the Little League in this and other countries main objective is to win, at any cost. Not too long ago the Little League World Series won notoriety because in the pursuit to win, one team had substituted boys older than regulation because they looked younger but could still play better because of their age. Team soccer is out for our family because it takes up a great deal of time and most Sundays. Yet this is not necessarily the case with every family - or every program.

²from Prodigy Interactive Personal Service June 27, 1993, quoting Strength Training for Young Athletes (Human Kinetics Publishers, \$16.95)

Many cities offer Recreation instruction in tennis, swimming, softball, basketball and other sports during the summer if not all year round. For older kids, churches can sponsor team play in volleyball or basketball or softball either within the church or with a group of churches competitively. Ask your youth director for advice. Team sports are an advantage in that all important "socialization problem" we as home schoolers are queried about so often. I would only urge caution that the fun of the game is stressed before the competition.

Also, don't join soccer, Little League, Karate and swimming all at the same time so the poor tyke is panting just to keep up with all this socialization and fitness. One sport is usually plenty and overtraining, which I will explain later, is as easy to achieve as under training and probably easier for the younger athlete. If your child is participating in a sport, either on his own, with you or with a team 2-3 times a week, that is usually enough and you can pat yourself on the back that he or she gets a better deal than any public school pupil in once weekly Physical Education. Much has been written on the frequency of regular exercise for adults. For children however, it needs to be adopted for the child. Many children, regardless of the shape of their parents are active because God made them that way. Perhaps that is the natural ideal for all of us and we have drifted away from it in our natural predisposition to go against that for which we were made. Some kind of daily physical activity for you and the children then is a good choice, provided it is low key and informal, such as a walk around the neighborhood, or a daily romp on park or backyard playground equipment. This is enough for the small children preschool age or even early elementary, but for you and older children slightly more demanding exercise will be necessary. The change for the older children is more strenuous exercise, but not everyday. Just as there are addictions to food and alcohol, there are addictions to exercise. Strenuous exercise on a daily basis is responsible for overtraining, as a mentioned before.

Overtraining is the state the body reaches when the exercise time exceeds or overlaps the rest time. The body does not add muscle or strength during exercise, but rather during rest. When the rest time is not there because of too much exercise, the body goes into a sort of tailspin and exercise at this point actually decreases strength and stores fat. Overtraining symptoms include erratic appetite, sleeplessness, mental sluggishness, a general feeling of achiness and soreness - in short, just like being out of shape and inactive. It is possible that children, because their bodies are still growing (often so fast) and much of the fuel and rest they need is going solely to growth, too much exercise and overtraining is reached sooner than is would with an adult.

BALANCING ACT

Here I must explain the difference in anaerobic and aerobic exercise. Aerobic, or "with air",

has become a word to mean that which you do in a gym or studio to music with 40 or 50 other sweating bodies. Its true meaning is that which the body does for a sustained period of time that uses the oxygen being taken in each moment to do its sustained activity. Think of the word AERO as in the British word for airplane, aeroplane. Air being breathed is the oxygen fuel used in any low to medium effort sustained activity such as walking, jogging, bike riding, swimming, dancing or any number of constant movement exercises.

ANAerobic or "without air" is an activity which uses stored oxygen in the body for a short burst of energy. When the body uses all that up, one must either rest, or reduce effort to replenish that energy. Weight lifting, sprint running, racquetball, tennis, basketball, and baseball are types of this kind of exercise - something you do in a start and stop manner. A combination of these types of exercises either simultaneously or separately is necessary for a balanced workout program. Most children at natural play do a combination of anaerobic and aerobic exercise. Combining these two types of exercise on a daily/weekly basis is what forms the basics of a balanced program. Much like eating too much of one kind of food is not healthy, even if it is good food; too much of one kind of exercise and not enough of another is not healthy. And like planning a menu for healthy eating, planning a group of activities such as a daily walk with a skills and muscle game activity afterwards, or an every other day bike ride interspersed with planned game of softball or lesson in martial arts 2 times a week is a balanced menu of activity. The only caution would be for those with a medical problem -- **always see your Doctor first!**

Down to the nitty gritty then...just exactly what is a balanced program? Each activity can be defined as an aerobic, or anaerobic activity, or simply a skills activity. There is nothing wrong with throwing or bouncing a ball to each child in a pattern such as in the game of "four square." In fact, for young elementary children this is a valuable beginning skill, and may be all a little one can take at one time, but it does not elevate the heart rate, or use muscles in an overloading manner. To increase fitness levels, one must elevate the heart rate to about 140 beats per minute³ for about 20 minutes to have a meaningful aerobic workout. To overload the muscles, and thereby increase muscle strength during and anaerobic phase, the muscles must be pushed to the point of failure, or tiredness. Then after a 48 hour rest, the muscle repairs itself, and will be stronger the next time you repeat that activity. Furthermore, each session, or workout should consist of a warm up time, and a cool down or stretching time. To follow up on the balanced diet metaphor, we can divide activity in the "four food groups" or four activities groups. Group A will be the warm up group. Group B will be the aerobic group, C will include the anaerobic activities and D will be cool down and stretching group.

GROUP A
walk

GROUP B
brisk walking

GROUP C
softball⁴

GROUP D
walk

³To find the most accurate assessment of the heart rate in the "aerobic training zone," simply subtract the age of the person from 220, find 60-80% of that figure and anywhere in that range is acceptable for aerobic exercise. For instance, a 10 year old person's age from 220 is 210. 60% of that is 126 heartbeats per minute and 80% is 168. Exercising between these two heart rates is the goal.

⁴ skills such as catch, hit, throw and run can be a game in

| | | | |
|------------------|---------------------|----------------|---------|
| jog | jogging | kickball | stretch |
| jumping jacks | biking | football | |
| dancing to music | swimming | tennis | |
| jump rope | hiking | racquetball | |
| | skating | weight lifting | |
| | jumping rope | calisthenics | |
| | dancing or aerobics | | |
| | mini trampoline | | |

Obviously, this is not in anyway a complete list. This is merely a starting point for you to put together a program for yourself and your children to participate in daily or every other day.⁵ For instance: Monday, Wednesday and Friday, choose one activity from Groups A, B, and D, and on Tuesday and Thursday, choose one from A, C and D, and then for 20 or 30 minutes, you play. If neither you nor your child has been participating in any type of activity, you need to start slow. If a walk around the block or to the park is a monumental task, plan to do it only three days a week for about a month. Gradually add length to the walk or some of the other activities to vary skills and interest. Unless you are a couch potato however, this may seem to be "just not enough". Then perhaps you and your child need to try some more challenging routines. A walk, slowly increasing in speed followed by a series of group B activities, followed by a choice from group C and ending with a cool down from group D is a well rounded workout any health club would be proud of -- without the dues.

If you have access to music, play some tapes with a good beat (130-140 per minute) and make up a routine based on the songs you like. Aerobic dance is big business these days not because the routines are anything new, but because its just more fun with music. I hate to admit how much I've spent on pop tapes and CD's just for one song I knew would be good for working out. I put it on the stereo and either jog in place or use a rebounder and I cannot keep my kids away! I have dubbed a personal selection from my Christian praise tapes that make the time a praise to Lord, a workout and a fun time with my children all at the same time.

EQUIPMENT AND THE MONEY

Some activities will require some instruction and equipment. Your first stop will still be the library. Weight lifting instruction, and stretching are two activities that can be harmful if done wrong, especially for children, so don't jump in without checking into some of the resources listed here or viewing some video instruction also often in the library. Without illustrations, I cannot show you what to do or what not to do and it can be dangerous to do some of the old stretching methods so many of us remember from P.E. class.

Equipment can vary from \$1.69 ball from the grocery store to several thousand dollars in playground or gym equipment. A good investment for a home school would be a large soft ball, a small soft ball and a football, a bat and mitt, a jump rope and chalk for playground games. A

and of themselves. Teams are not needed to have a "game."

⁵ A sample program is included in the resource section of this article.

sporting goods store or variety store (Target, K-Mart, etc.) will have everything you need and you will not end up spending more than \$50 -- less if you shop around. Frills are extra and not always very helpful. More money is spent on wacko exercise equipment in this country than what could feed several third world nations. In fact, give me a call, I may be able to interest you in a Thighmaster or Chestblaster or two. I would recommend a set of 3, 5 and 10 pound dumbbells for ages 8 and over. These might cost an additional \$20-30 but can be very helpful in building strength in pre-adolescent ages. Save your money for lessons in swimming or tennis which all of you can enjoy or join the Recreation classes offered in the summer in many cities.

If you do not live near a park and think that investing in a good swing and play set would serve your family well that too can be a good investment. Sets can cost anywhere between \$200 and \$1000. Be careful of how much you spend there too, however. A swing, a place to climb and play in the sand or run on the grass is all many children seem to spend their time doing at the park and I can't tell you how often I have looked at lonely swing sets rusting away while the kids are off playing with a simple squirt gun and hose or a truck in the dirt. Make sure you have the room and the place to anchor a set as well; cheaper sets break and even fall over. James Dobson tells a story how about possessions end up "possessing" him when he bought a wonderful gift of a swing set for his children and spent an entire weekend wrestling with it, taking its millions of parts and putting it together only to find at the end of the instruction booklet in small type: **WARNING: It is important to check and retighten every bolt and mechanism monthly for safe play and proper maintenance!** The Dobson children are long grown (and the Dobson's moved away) but I'll bet that swing set is still in that back yard.

AIM FOR THE JOY

Our goal with our children is to educate them, grow them with love and take care of their bodies and minds while God has given us charge over them. One of the most wonderful things we can do as home schoolers is give our children the love of doing things just because it is a joy. It is a joy to read, a joy to learn and create and it is a joy to be strong and healthy.

If you and your child have been sedentary, 5 days a week for short time periods will help to establish a pattern. Three times a week should be the beginning minimum in any case. In a few months you may wish to increase your exercise time to five days weekly or add a different activity to the weekend. The goal is **TIME** and **CONSISTENCY**. A sick day or week should slow anyone down, but begin again. You will enjoy watching your children gain confidence physically just as they do academically. Doing too much will overtrain and you will notice sleep disturbances, a general soreness all over, and/or a sense of drudgery and short-temperedness. Do less at those times, or take a few days off and see if the feeling subsides.

Again, three to five days a week of moderate activity is all you and your children should aim for. Good nutrition and plenty of sleep cannot be ignored, though that is beyond the scope of this discussion. We are not trying to create Olympians but wouldn't it be great if you discovered one!

SAMPLE PROGRAM

Even on a rainy day, as long as there is at least 6 or 8 square feet of floor, there is room for a workout.

- I. First, turn on some music. Marching or upbeat music with a strong beat around 120-140 beats per minute match most of the exercise speed and help to keep interest. Begin to march, dance and move, right to left and front to back. Aerobic videos abound if you lack imagination, and even morning television has a dozen different shows to help with movement ideas. Nothing fancy is necessary, but don't do your old school toe touch and stretches. Warm up first for five minutes and then REACH for the sky, REACH right, then left, and out to each side. A beginning program should continue for at least 10 minutes and your goal is 20 minutes. Adding one minute at a day and you will reach the goal. Difficulty can be determined by the following standard, if you can talk fairly comfortably and still be moving, you are going at the correct pace.
- II. After the aerobic portion, a cool down portion of slowing down the movements is necessary to return the heart rate to near normal. This is the time for more stretching if you desire, but I like to wait until the end of the session.
- III. Strength training is the next section to the workout. Major muscle groups such as the chest, back, abdominals and legs are the focus of a good beginning workout. Working from head to toe, begin with a push up against a wall, or better yet on the floor. Work toward good form -- a straight line from ears to heels, arms directly underneath the shoulders. Five against the wall, and as many as you can do on the floor is the starting point. Goal would be 3 sets of 10 pushup repetitions each. This works both the chest and the back in the beginning, but a fun exercise to strengthen the back is sitting facing each other, feet pressed against your partners, hands held. Alternate pulling, and resisting the pull, to create a rowing motion. This is good for stretching too, if you pull and hold the position for a few seconds.

Abdominals can be worked by the basic curl up. Different from the old fashioned sit-up, which works the hip flexors as much or more than the abdominals, the curl up emphasizes the correct muscle group. Begin as with a sit up, on the back, knees bent. Lift the shoulders and head and tighten the middle, hold, lower and repeat. Do as many as you can, but not too fast. Momentum is not the goal here, but fatigue of the abdominals. Do as many as you can and try to work up to 3 sets of 25.

The best leg exercises are also good during the aerobic workout as they use a lot of energy. They are the squat, the lunge and the toe up. The squat is just that, squat down until the upper legs are parallel to the floor. The lunge is a movement where one leg steps forward and bends at the knee. Again, don't go lower than upper leg parallel to the floor. The toe up is simply going up on tip-toes and back down again.

In all these exercises, speed is not what you are aiming for. Steady, 1-2 second repetitions, good body alignment (not leaning over too far or weight unevenly distributed) is much more effective than rushing through the routine just to be done.

- IV. Now is the best part of workout -- stretching! I usually begin by sitting legs out in front and grasping at my calves to reach my torso towards my feet. Think chest towards legs, reach and hold....not bounce, bounce, bounce. Bouncing during stretching can really hurt the

muscle. Roll back on your back and grasp your knees to your chest. Then drop one leg and hold one leg to the chest, hold, then switch. Roll over to left side and grab the right ankle with the right hand while supporting on the floor with the left hand. Roll over to the right side repeat. Sitting up, reach left palm up and try to touch the back of the left shoulder. Press on the back of the elbow with the right hand and feel the stretch in the back of the arm, then repeat on other side.

SUPPLEMENTAL 6 WEEK SCHEDULE

Suggested Weekly Schedule, 20 - 40 minutes daily

WEEK I

Monday: warm up walk 5-10 minutes, then:

Younger children (3-6) ball play or bike riding 20 minutes

Older children (7-teens) aerobic activity of choice 20 minutes. (Aerobic activity includes steady large muscle repeat activity such as bike riding, walking, jogging, skating, and swimming. Go at a pace that keeps talking possible, neither out of breath or too slow.)

Tuesday: warm up walk 5-10 minutes, then:

Younger children, skills activity: Beginner skating, throwing/catching various size balls, T-Ball hitting and running to base, hopscotch, or rope jumping games, ball bouncing towards targets.

Older children, muscle conditioning: In every activity, begin with one set of ten repetitions (or whatever is possible to start). Increase in increments to 3 sets of 12 repetitions over the 3-6 weeks. Rest between sets no more than 45-90 seconds.

Push ups : bent knees, straight back, arms slightly wider than shoulder width. Increase to straight legs when 3 sets of 12 is possible and begin with one set of 10 straight and 2 sets of 10 bent knees, gradually increasing number done with straight legs. Push ups can also be done against a wall if floor push ups are too hard to begin with.

Pull ups: palms away from the body. Can be done with assistance at first since this is very difficult.

Knee Bends or Squats: Bend only as far as upper legs parallel to ground with back straight.

Sit up, Curl up: Lift from abdominal area, and go only as high as half way to bent knees.

Further lifting uses another muscle group.

Do not rush through the exercises. 20 minutes is about right to start. When the child can complete 3 sets of 12 repetitions in these exercises, small weights can be used during squats, and resistance can be added by a partner or someone pressing or pulling in an opposite direction.

Wednesday and Friday, repeat Monday

Thursday, repeat Tuesday.

Week II and III

Repeat week one adding 2-3 minutes daily of walking warm up to maximum 20 minutes.

Week IV-VI:

Younger children may want to continue on the same schedule with a new skill or game or they may want to try to do the Mileage plot as described below. Choose a more local destination and use a lot of stickers!

Older children, do one of the following:

- A: Begin mileage plot (see details below),
- B: Continue following previous weeks I-III for those still desiring to improve basic skills, or,
- C: Continue on alternate daily schedule mapped out in weeks I-III substituting light jog for walking, and/or games or skills for muscle conditioning.

Mileage plot:

Plot your mileage on a map or chart. Use mileage equivalents for activities other than walking or jogging, such as

| | | | |
|---------------|---------------------|----------|---------------------|
| Aerobic dance | 10 minutes = 1 mile | Rowing | 10 minutes = 1 mile |
| Bicycling | 3 miles = 1 mile | swimming | 450 yards= 1 mile |
| Jogging | 1 mile = 1 mile | walking | = 1 mile |
| Rebounding | 12 minutes = 1 mile | | |
| Rope jumping | 8 minutes = 1 mile | | |

See how soon you can make it to a personal goal such as across the United States or to a selected destination on your map.

In the following weeks, you can repeat the program using new games and skills, or choose to sign up for a recreational activity such as swimming, tennis, gymnastics, baseball or soccer. If the child has not reached the set goals, or has found an individual sport which interests him or her, go ahead and encourage the activity, or extend the goal period for a successful outcome for the slower starters. This is one place for "outcome based education" -- the time it takes to reach goals is not as important as the achievement itself.

An alternative to repeating the program is to change the day pattern, i.e. make Tuesday/Thursday the aerobic days and Monday/Wednesday/Friday the conditioning/skills days. Also, incorporating an aerobic period of 20 minutes (plus warm up) and 20 minutes of muscle conditioning in one day and alternating a specific sports skill or game on the other days is a pattern used by a lot of athletes to improve their selected sport. Any sport can be improved by muscle conditioning on alternate days, especially if the strength training is designed to assist the specific muscles in a given sport, such as the arm muscles in archery, or leg muscles in track or skating.

Younger children might also wish to set goals such as are found on page (), the skills list. Also, all ages may wish to inquire about the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports Fitness Award. Local public schools may participate or write:

Presidential Sports Award
P.O. Box 5214
FDR Post Office
New York, NY 10150-5214

Keeping logs of activities such as how many repetitions completed or distances achieved is great for boosting self confidence. Once a goal is achieved, you can determine the difficulty of the next goal based on the first. You can even repeat the goal using new standards such as getting to a certain point in less time. Sports sponsors are famous for handing out rewards based on certain achievements such as T-shirts, shoes, bicycles, new equipment, ribbons and plaques. Start your own family fitness awards!

RESOURCES

A Fun Physical Fitness Program for the Home School, by Sono Sata

Harris, published by Christian Life Workshops, Gresham, OR, 1988. A good variety of exercises for strength, flexibility and fun. Comes with a audio tape explanation of the exercises contained in the program.

Family Fitness Fun, by Charles Kuntzleman, published by Here's Life

Publishers, San Bernardino, CA 1990. A very thorough treatment of how a family can become more involved with fitness and nutrition.

Arnold's Fitness for Kids, by Arnold Schwarzenegger with Charles Gains,

published by Doubleday, New York, 1993, Volumes I (birth to 5), II (6-10), and III (11-14). From the king of fitness, a good sampling of exercises to involve your children in fitness Arnold style, though he digresses into stories of his growing up in Austria, very readable and easy to follow.

Kid's Fitness: A Complete Shape up Program from Birth through High School,

by Kenneth Cooper, published by Bantam, New York, 1991. Kenneth Cooper in the father of modern aerobics. The book is very detailed and helpful. I found it advanced, however, and geared mostly toward adolescents.