

Step Up for a Healthy Summer

By NH First Lady Dr. Susan Lynch

Every day, our children are tempted by the allure of video games, television shows, texting and internet surfing -- tough competition for those promoting a physically active lifestyle. And, adults aren't faring any better. We're quick to come up with an excuse to skip the exercise routine, citing a hectic workweek, exhaustion, or other priorities.

As we begin summer -- a glorious season across every region of New Hampshire -- let's take a pledge to get active and healthy -- for our children and for ourselves.

We face a very real challenge. According to the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, one in three American children is overweight or obese. The costs are incalculable -- from the negative impact on the self-esteem and educational development of children to chronic illness to the very real and profound economic implications on our businesses and health care system. We are proud that here in New Hampshire, leaders from across educational, health, non-profit, agrarian and civic sectors are finding new ways to address these complex issues. Through their collaboration, we will ensure the productivity and health of our communities and the vitality of our state.

We can begin with a few simple steps.

The basic health equation for everyone, both children and adults, is ample physical activity and healthy nutrition. Both of these solutions confront real obstacles, especially during these tough economic times. Access to physical activity is challenged by the lack of resources, supervision, and safe playgrounds and sidewalks. Budget-friendly, high calorie, processed foods are too readily available and tempt young and old away from nutritional alternatives. We know that caring adults, in partnership with community resources, can help families navigate these complex choices.

The Foundation for Healthy Communities and the Harvard Pilgrim Health Care Foundation are strong supporters of the 5-2-1-0 mnemonic as an easy reference for important daily elements of physical activity and nutrition:

5 -- Eat five colorful fruits and vegetables. Put the bounty of NH's farming communities to work. This is especially effective when children are involved in menu selection and preparation.

2 -- Limit screen time (computers, TV, electronic games) to two hours. Our streams, mountains and parks are waiting to welcome you for your next adventure.

1 -- Engage in at least one hour of moderate to rigorous physical activity. Turn a stroll into a hike, a walk into a run, video time into a game of one-on-one basketball or dance.

0 -- No sugar-sweetened beverages (sports drinks, soda or juice). Mother Nature gave us a free, delicious alternative: water!

Physical activity improves your health, strengthens your family through shared experience, and teaches a lot of important life lessons. CATCH Kids Club, based throughout NH, understands the power of play to build healthy bodies and more responsible young people. CATCH, a fun, non-competitive physical activity program, can be found at Boys & Girls Clubs, YMCAs, Park & Recreation programs and afterschool programs. Enroll your child and watch him or her gain fitness and self-esteem.

And, this week, you can get your whole family involved. My husband John, the Governor has proclaimed the week of June 1st as “Walk New Hampshire Week”. Created by the Foundation for Healthy Communities and sponsored by the Harvard Pilgrim Foundation, Walk NH encourages children and adults to walk together as part of a healthy lifestyle choice. The goal is bold: participants pledge to walk the width (70 miles) or length (90 miles) of New Hampshire. Families, classrooms, and community organizations can complete the challenge as a team. Participants receive a log to record their efforts, and once the final goal is achieved, they receive an ‘I Walked NH’ patch and a certificate signed by the Governor and me as the Walk New Hampshire spokesperson.

There are more than 80 organized walks in 28 communities all across the state. You can join in an existing walk or create your own course. In Manchester on Monday, the students at the Beech Street School joined us to kick off Walk NH with Mayor Frank Guinta, Superintendent Tom Brennan, Harvard Pilgrim CEO Charlie Baker and Max the mascot of the Manchester Monarchs. As the children walked, they viewed the healthy message murals and outdoor recreational space improvements promoting physical activity and healthy nutrition created by volunteers from Harvard Pilgrim, Northeast Delta Dental, the Manchester Monarchs and City Year. For more information on Walk NH, please visit: www.WalkNH.org.

Healthy children are better students and healthy adults build stronger communities. Please join us as we begin on the road to being the healthiest state – one step at a time.