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Headline: Could trampolines help fix our kids' obesity problem?

Summary: By 2050, 60% of adult men and 50% of adult females will be obese, costing the country £50 billion. This week is the first National Childhood Obesity Week (5th-11th July) so what can we do keep our children trim? Get them bouncing, argues Atlantic Trampolines, which this week is rolling out an incentive scheme for schools to encourage home trampolining

Did you realise that as a nation we are now so inactive that three in 10 children are either overweight or obese? Only 75 per cent of children are getting the recommended hour of exercise a day. And it's also been proven that parents consistently overestimate the activity levels of their children – fact. Our kids are, on average, watching a screen for more than a staggering five hours a day. Vitamin D deficiency and rickets in children – often caused by a lack of daylight – is on the increase. A lack of outdoor exercise is also causing an increase in asthma among children. Obesity is linked to an increased risk of cancer, heart and liver disease and diabetes and watching a lot of television is linked to an increase in weight levels and attention problems at school.

Healthier children are proven to do better in learning and in life and encouraging healthy habits is not only crucial for the nation's health but also for its bank balance. After all, unless we crack the obesity problem now, the cost of treating the consequent health problems could be horrendous.

Given these startling facts it's no surprise then that the Government this year launched a £9 million Change4Life initiative in a bid to make our nation – and in particular our children – fitter. Television advertising starts in July with families then being offered tailor-made 'action' plans.

So what can we do as parents to ensure that our children stay healthy? Increasingly now the Government, celebrity role models, dieticians and health campaigners are promoting trampolining as an ideal recreational activity for kids. Labour MP Ed Balls has said that offering trampolining in schools is a great way of boosting girls' participation levels in sport, as often they lag behind boys. Footballer and presenter of 'Unfit Kids' Ian Wright also advocates trampolining in his book 'Fitter Families'. The British Heart Foundation backs trampolining in its 'Get Kids on the Go' campaign and Bristol University's Professor of Exercise and Health Sciences, Ken Fox, writing for the NHS, advocates it as a way of getting 'active with your kids', so parents can join in, have some fun as a family and set a good example.

As Swansea Trampoline Club Coach Andrew Sivertson says: 'Trampolining is great for kids because it is fun, it's different and it's easier to encourage children to do exercise if it's fun and to keep them interested. Joining a club is also a social event and the sport is growing.' And while some parents remain cautious about the safety aspects, many are coming round to the benefits. As Pauline Kent from Norwich said: 'I was sceptical but my four children love the trampoline and it's helped one with his asthma, the other with his weight and the final two just go outdoors loads more so they are not on the Playstation so much.' As Andrew Jardine, Director of Atlantic Trampolines says: 'Many parents tell us that buying a trampoline has been the best investment they have ever made because of the hours of fun it gives children. It's also ideal for children who are overweight who may feel that conventional sports are not for them.'

Studies done by NASA – which uses trampolines to train its astronauts – show that trampolining is: 'the most efficient and effective form of exercise yet devised by man'. It exercises every area of the body and is more effective than sit-ups at strengthening the stomach and burns more calories per hour than jogging. It is also the most low-impact aerobic exercise you can do apart from swimming, which is why it is ideal for overweight children (and adults) and people with joint problems. By stimulating the lymphatic system it helps rid the body of toxins too, so potentially it could help kids catch fewer bugs too.

And not only is trampolining a great fitness tool for healthy children, it is also being used to address a huge range of specific health problems. Children's 'get fit' clubs are using trampolines to help children shift unwanted pounds. Specialist health camps are using trampolining for children with ADHD. Parents of children with muscular dystrophy are using them to try to keep their children's muscles strong. And by using the unique properties of a trampoline, trained therapists are also able to help develop balance, movement, fitness, communication and a wide range of other skills in children with mild to severe physical disabilities, including autism.

Safety Tips

So if you do decide to buy a trampoline, knowing and observing trampoline safety rules is vital for to avoid accidents. The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) has issued a set of guidelines for families (see www.atlantictrampolines.co.uk/template/safety but the main points to remember are:

- 1) Only one person should be on a trampoline at a time
- 2) The trampoline must be properly maintained and any damage promptly repaired
- 3) Under 6s need to take extra care as they are most likely to get hurt
- 4) There should be responsible supervision at all times
- 5) A safety net should be used and children should not jump on or off the trampoline
- 6) Stunts should be avoided
- 7) Going to a club is advisable to learn the basics properly

For a full list of local clubs nationwide see www.nightflyer.co.uk or call your local leisure centre as many run open classes for both children and adults.

Games for Kids

And to help keep your children's interest in the trampoline, why not suggest the following games:

Simon Says

One person outside the trampoline shouts out various instructions and the trampoliner performs those actions eg Simon says jump on one leg, Simon says land on our bottom, Simon says jump up and clap your hands.

Follow me

One child starts out by making a move, which the second child must then copy. Additional moves are added one at a time to make a routine and when the second child fails to copy the routine accurately he is out and it is then his turn to create a routine.

Ring around the Rosy

This game is a favourite with young children. They chant: 'Ring around the rosy, pocket full of posies, ashes, ashes, we all fall down!' and they will have great fun falling down. In fact many little ones really just enjoy and kind of singing and dancing on the trampoline.

Buying a Trampoline

For help and advice as to which trampoline is right for you – or to buy parts and accessories for your existing trampoline – call the UK trampoline specialists Atlantic Trampolines at Bounce House on the freephone TRAMPO-LINE: 0800 032 5879. Atlantic Trampolines is a member of RoSPA and recently ran 'Buy a Safety Net' campaign in a bid to cut trampoline accidents this summer.

Schools incentive scheme

Atlantic Trampolines is this week writing to schools in Pembrokeshire and Bristol to ask them to promote its trampolines to parents in return for a £15 donation to the school. If your school is interested in taking part in this scheme, please contact Atlantic Trampolines at hello@atlantictrampolines.co.uk

Media information

For further information about National Childhood Obesity Week see www.mendcentral.org

Company information

Atlantic Trampolines is a fast growing Pembrokeshire based company with offices in Bristol which specialises in selling only quality, affordable trampolines backed up by great service and free next day UK delivery. It is also the biggest supplier of trampoline parts in the UK. It gives a five year guarantee of its trampolines' framework and one year guarantee on the components. Trampoline packages start at £54.99. See www.atlantictrampolines.co.uk or speak to the experts at Bounce House on the TRAMPO-LINE 0800 032 5879.

Atlantic Trampolines is a member of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents.

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