

LIFESTYLE

Move it, kid!

GETTING YOUR CHILD TO EXERCISE

Help your child find activities he or she might enjoy, such as joining a sports team, taking dance lessons or doing yoga.

Make exercise a part of daily life for the entire family. Go for walks. Bike to the beach. Play interactive games.

Add more activity to the day — park farther away from the grocery store or take the stairs.

Start exercising yourself so you're a positive role model for your child.

Make being active fun by making it a game — ride bikes, throw a Frisbee or shoot some hoops. If it's fun, they won't mind exercising.

Consult your pediatrician to make sure the exercise regimen is safe and appropriate for the child's age and weight.

Source: Paige Waehner, a certified personal trainer who specializes in exercise for children.

To find a health club near you International Health, Racquet and Sportsclub Association — ihrsa.org



Teens and younger children are working with personal trainers and health clubs to meet their fitness goals and stem the tide of childhood obesity.

BY TINA SHAH
STAFF WRITER

Twice a week, 16-year-old Taylor Tuerk visits the Boca Raton Life Time Fitness center for a two-hour session with his personal trainer, Ryan Byars.

"Stay focused with me," says Byars, tossing a 10-pound ball to Taylor, working his thighs and arms on a recent afternoon.

"Don't take it easy on me," Byars shouts. "Harder than that."

Increasingly, South Florida health clubs are becoming familiar territory for teens like Taylor, and younger kids, who are motivated to get in shape. Parents, now more than ever, are working with health professionals and personal trainers to combat rising rates of childhood obesity and promote healthy lifestyles early.

Fitness centers in Broward and Palm Beach counties are offering a growing number of programs for families so parents can keep their kids off the couches and on the exercise machines or mats.

At Xpress Fitness in Manalapan, which opened in 2005, kids ages 12 to 15 work out for free. Personal trainers work closely with physical education classes in schools and run a fitness boot camp during the summer.

At Fitness 21 in Sunrise, Lynn Ginter heads

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Sounding new alarms on childhood obesity

■ EXERCISE

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the four-week Kidfit program for kids ages 4-15. "It's an introduction to wellness," said Ginter, who caters the program to sports lovers and those who prefer aerobics or dance. Ginter said the classes were started in response to parents' suggestions; they cost \$20 each and are a combination of nutritional instruction, strength exercises and games.

At the Rumba and Fitness Studio in Pompano Beach, instructors began offering more kids-only classes in Latin dance workouts this month.

And at Memorial Hospital West Fitness and Rehabilitation Center in Pembroke Pines, there are programs for kids of all ages, including Cardio Kids (for ages 6-11) and Movement for teens (12-18), which uses pop music to get participants in shape.

These new programs for younger fitness buffs are emerging in South Florida and across the nation, as health experts are sounding new alarms on childhood obesity. Some 17 percent of children and adolescents ages 2-19 are overweight, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Obesity rates among children ages 6-11 increased from 11

percent in 1988-94 to 19 percent in 2003-04.

The trend has inspired some celebrities to step up. In the ABC show *Shaq's Big Challenge*, Heat star Shaquille O'Neal pushes six overweight middle-school children to follow an intense exercise regimen and improve their diets.

Public officials are also getting in on the act. In May, Gov. Charlie Crist signed a bill into law that requires schools this fall to offer kids from kindergarten through high school up to four hours of physical education classes weekly. Until now Florida has left it up to individual school districts to create a physical education curriculum.

But health experts advise parents to take steps on their own to build healthy diets and exercise habits in their children. And health clubs and other facilities are increasingly providing parents more options to do so.

Children are the fastest-growing demographic of health club members, according to the International Health, Racquet and Sportsclub Association, representing 5,200 health clubs in the United States. From 1987 to 2005, the number of children between the ages of 6 and 17 who joined health clubs quadrupled from 1.3 mil-

lion to 5.1 million.

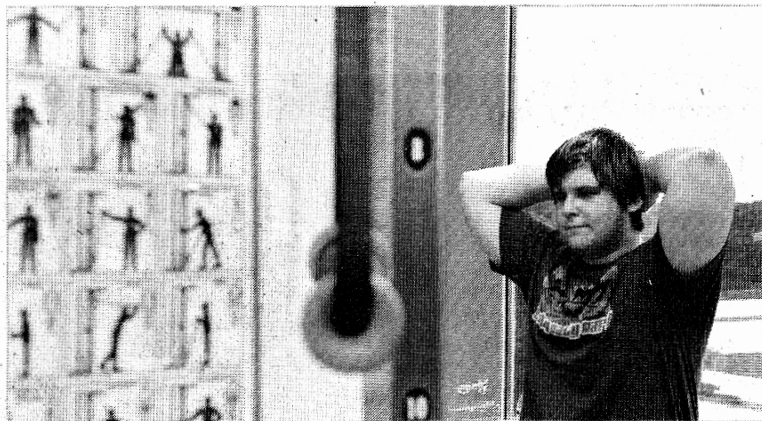
"We've had an increase in parents enrolling kids with them," said Danny Jenkins, general manager at Bally Total Fitness in Fort Lauderdale. He noted four of the 15 Bally's clubs in Florida have tae kwon do classes for those 4 years of age and older, and the club plans to offer personal trainers for kids.

But experts say parents don't need to join a health club to build healthy habits in their kids. Jogging, swimming at the beach, bicycling, playing sports or tennis or even taking walks in the neighborhood are all great workouts.

Marcus Tuerk, Taylor's father, said he hired a personal trainer for his son to make sure he was exercising properly. Byars charges \$69 to \$89 an hour for his services. Taylor, like many kids his age, planned to spend the summer playing computer and video games, but his father had a different plan.

"He was tired. He was fatigued," said the Boca resident. "It had to do with his lifestyle and working out would change his lifestyle."

Byars knows how to engage his younger clients by keeping it fun. Using medicine balls, stretch ropes, machines and other equipment, he attempts to keep Taylor's mind off the



DIFFERENT GAME PLAN: Taylor Tuerk, 16, had planned to spend the summer playing computer and video games, but his father had a different plan and hired him a trainer. **Staff photo/Carey Wagner**

workout and more on getting the ball higher in the air or pulling the rope farther away.

Byars, who moved from Kentucky to Deerfield Beach because of Florida's large fitness industry, said he has trained five kids. One of the most memorable was an overweight high school girl. She lost 10 pounds at the end of eight months, but what Byars remembers most is that exercising lifted spirits.

His goal for the kids is not only to lose weight, but also to feel good about themselves and carry the habits

to adulthood.

Byars advises parents not to lash out with negative comments, not overload kids with heavy weights that can harm muscle growth and do their share at home by moderating their kids' diet: eating regularly and snacking less.

Byars' motto: "Keep them occupied. Keep it fun."

Tina Shah can be reached at tshah@sun-sentinel.com or 954-356-4593 or 561-243-6600.

The making of “Move it, kid!” by Tina Shah

"News you can use" is the consumer affairs team's motto at the *South Florida Sun-Sentinel*. A story highlighting the spike in personal trainers and health clubs catering to children fits the goal. I pitched this story to my editor, Nick Tate, and he and I worked to widen the scope of reporting because it is a regional issue. Childhood obesity is common to and a concern of households throughout Fort Lauderdale and the nation. I spoke with more than a dozen gym owners and personal trainers who candidly spoke about the benefits of children exercising and the precautions parents must take. I spent hours with a personal trainer and his young client to understand the motivation trainers instill to push the kids. After several edits, especially on the lead, the story ran on the cover of the Lifestyle section. It was worth the effort.

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