

# Health On-the-Go: Keeping Your Kids Healthy on Vacation

by Mira Rasmussen, BS, ACSM-HFS

**S**taying healthy on vacation doesn't have to contradict the let-loose and be-free attitude we look forward to. In fact, staying healthy on vacation enhances the experience by offsetting mood swings and keeping our energy levels up. Happy kid equals happy parent, right?

All too often, we associate overindulging with vacation, making choices that leave us and our kids feeling overfed and lethargic. Instead, make this summer vacation one that captures the balance of adventure and indulgence. These tips for activity and nutrition will help keep your kids healthy while on-the-go.

## Kid's Plan One Event Daily

When planning your vacation, it's important to get the kids involved. Instead of a vacation that is just associated with the destination, look to see what activities are unique to your route. Then have your kids decide which activities appeal to them most. This will allow for travel stops they can look forward to.

Choose active locations for a rest stop instead of a restaurant, places where you can take a quick walk on a nature trail or at least play five rounds of "Simon Says" before getting back into the car. Many larger cities have parks or play areas that are characteristic of the area.

Zoos or aquariums are another great place to go while traveling. They differ quite a bit from city to city, and they

can be short-visit places vs. destinations. Regardless of your choice, look for stops that provide room to burn energy and disengage from sitting entertainments.

## Electronics are for Sitting Periods Only

If sitting for long periods is a mandatory part of your trip, such as a plane or car ride, make an agreement with the kids that travel periods while sitting will be the only time allowed for electronics (challenge yourself on this too). Otherwise, the plan is to move!

Once you're out of the vehicle and standing, make a game out of finding a stairway to take or associate waiting in line to marching (or dancing) in place.

Discussion of this arrangement is best before you leave for your trip so kids understand it's not a punishment, but a well thought out agreement between you. The benefit is true engagement in family experiences and the memories that come with it!

## Be Active in Your Surroundings

Children and teenagers need at least 60 minutes of physical movement daily. Many vacation spots provide more activities than what initially meets the eye. Beach trips are a great time to swim with the sea animals.

At the beach, you can also:

- Go snorkeling.
- Play Bocce ball.
- Walk around and collect shells together.

If you find yourself in a city, look for a bike-sharing system where you can pick up a bike at a kiosk. Use this mode of transportation instead of a taxi service. Not only will you get to see the city in a whole different light, but you've accomplished your day's activity before you even arrived to your destination!

Other pastimes becoming popular are inner-city kayaking and water sports. See if there are any city lakes or rivers near your destination spot. Spending an hour each day in movement will help keep everyone's energy levels more balanced, which leads to better-behaved kids during less active periods of the day.

## Make Nature Activities More Game-like

A hike doesn't have to be just a hike. Make a scavenger hunt out of it! Here's how:

- Find 10 plants with a shade of red on them.
- Identify at least four animals on the hike (easy options such as a deer, dog, lizard, fish).
- Find a water source (rain or dew drops, water fall, or lake), etc.
- Count the time it takes your family to travel inbound on the trail and see if you can beat your time outbound.

Projects in nature, like setting up a tent or building a fire, can be very rewarding without a thought to physical activity. Many national parks also have a Junior Ranger program, where kids can receive a badge after participating in special activities, games or puzzles. Ultimately, they are being active while learning more about the environment you're in.

## Travel to Family or Friends

Maybe your trip this summer is to a relative's or friend's house. You can still ensure your kids are active daily by encouraging acts of service for your host. Activities like washing their car together or working in their garden offer a chance to connect with natural conversation.

After an hour or two of visiting, let your hosts know that it's important for you to have active time with the kids. See if all the adults will participate! Build a fort in the backyard, set up a good-old-fashioned sack race, play a game of horseshoes, or set up a little outdoor theatre on the porch where everyone gets dressed up and acts out stories together. The more involved you get, the more your kids will believe that being active is a family affair, not just a distraction for them. Though destination vacations have their place, children often describe their favorite trips in connection to people, not places.



## Adventure Vacations

Trips centered around action make activity goals a breeze. Dare to get out of your family's comfort zone by planning a trip with whitewater rafting, zip-lining, scuba diving, spelunking or mountain biking. There are usually some age and weight requirements to look into first, but many of these activities can be surprisingly kid-friendly and make memories for a lifetime!

**CHECK OUT THESE EXTRA TIPS for making your summer vacation as healthy as possible:**

### The 80/20 Rule for Nutrition

It can be hard to pass up a Dairy Queen on the road or ignore New York's famous pizza while in New York City. Instead of overindulging, make 20 percent of the calories your family eats each day the treat of their choice, then try to make the healthiest decisions for the rest of your meals that day.

Part of traveling can be experiencing a variety of foods, and this can be a great addition to vacation as long as there's balance between what your body needs for fuel and what it considers a treat. Think of the calories

your family eats each day as a bank account. If your family saves on calories from treats earlier in the day by choosing a nourishing breakfast and a well-balanced lunch, then dinner that night can be indulgent and satisfying.

### Water is Choice

Flying by plane, driving or just being out in the sun can easily dehydrate us. Stock your car, backpack and hotel room with bottled water and make sure to carry it everywhere you go. Not only will regular hydration keep everyone healthier, but this drink choice goes along with the 80/20 rule for nutrition. It's easy for kids to drink their calories with juice and soda instead of saving those calories for something they will remember more, like eating ice-cream at a one-of-a-kind diner while they cherish the day's events.

### Five a Day

Vegetables and some fruits have the highest amounts of vitamins and minerals that make our bodies feel and function well, no matter what age group we fit into. As important as these foods are in daily life, they become even more important as you attempt to balance the nutrient-empty foods, such as treat foods

that are high in fat, sugar or foods that break down into sugar. Prioritizing nutrient-rich plant-foods, like oranges and leafy greens, will help keep your immune system ready to fight off travel germs and keep your family healthy throughout the trip.

### Pack Snacks

Resist the urge to push through your day and skip meals until the activities are over. Not only will this lead to cranky kids (not to mention the adults), but hunger and fatigue can quickly lead to extra-large meals that are less nourishing. Packing some healthy easy-travel snacks like beef jerky, small pouches of nuts or protein-enriched granola bars will help keep your family's energy levels going strong.



### Conclusion:

Vacation is a great time to feel your best and engage in all the festivities the trip has to offer. When kids get a chance to be active each day, they are more focused and calm when the trip requires it, not to mention their rest will be deeper at the end of the day (allowing you to achieve the relaxation time you deserve, too). Energizing your family with healthy foods and teaching balance in indulgences will demonstrate the care you have for yourself and your family — making any experience on-the-go healthier and happier!

#### **About the Author:**

*Mira Rasmussen, BS, ACS-HFS, is the founder and president of Fitness Beyond Training, LLC, which specializes in functional training for the general population, athletes and those managing disease or any physical limitations. As an exercise physiologist and health professional for the last eleven years, Mira Rasmussen is passionate about personalizing fitness and nutrition plans to create lasting lifestyle changes. Committed to promoting a healthy lifestyle, she serves on the Obesity Action Coalition's Education Committee. For more information on Mira, please visit [www.fitnessbeyondtraining.com](http://www.fitnessbeyondtraining.com).*



# ABOUT THE OBESITY ACTION COALITION (OAC)

The Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) is a National non-profit organization dedicated to giving a voice to individuals affected by obesity and helping them along their journey toward better health. Our core focuses are to elevate the conversation of weight and its impact on health, improve access to obesity care, provide science-based education on obesity and its treatments, and fight to eliminate weight bias and discrimination.



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The OAC knows that the journey with weight can be challenging but we also know that great things happen when we learn, connect and engage. That is why the OAC Community exists. Our Community is designed to provide quality education, ongoing support programs, an opportunity to connect, and a place to take action on important issues.

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