

Adventure Awaits at SUMMER CAMP

by Sarah Muntel, RD

Picture this... It's a chilly mid-March afternoon. Moms across the country are scouring Web sites and newsletters as they search for summer camp activities their kids can participate in. Many of them perfectly time online sign-ups just to ensure their kids get in to the right session of the right camp. Others put funds away all year to make sure their kids have a great summer experience. Sound bizarre? What is all the hype surrounding summer camp? What is the benefit to kids and what do summer camps have to offer?

DIVERSITY IS OUT THERE

First, know that there are many types of summer camps your kids can take part in. It's amazing to see the variety of camps which kids can experience in just one summer, and there really is a camp for every kid out there! In this article, you'll find a variety of camp choices that are likely offered in your area, along with the types of activities often provided. You just need to look for them! However... it will probably make you want to be a kid again!



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DIFFERENT TYPES OF SUMMER CAMPS

- **Nature Camp:** Rowing, canoeing, hiking, sailing, park day camp
- **Camps with Animals:** Horse camp, zoo camp, outdoor animal camp
- **Life Skills Camp:** Cooking camp, sewing camp, computer camp
- **The Arts:** Drama camp, music camp, painting camp, sculpting camp
- **Sports Camp:** Basketball, volleyball, baseball, soccer
- **Enrichment:** Science camp, STEM camp, grade-level learning camp
- **Activity Camps:** Outdoor game camp, water camp, fitness camp
- **Overnight Camps:** Outdoor sleep-away camp, overnight sports camps, church camps

Truthfully, there are so many different camps to choose from and the process can be a little overwhelming. Take a moment to talk with your child and decide what some of their interests might be. A camp listing can be a great starting point for what may be options available for the summer. You may be surprised by what your child wants to try! Encourage a variety of experiences this summer.



THE BENEFITS OF ATTENDING SUMMER CAMP

With so many different types of camps out there, what are the benefits of signing your kids up for a variety of summer sessions this year?

Greater Social Skills

Many times, kids enter a camp without knowing anyone at all. That can be tough, but that’s also life. Kids stick with their friends during the school year. Camp can be an opportunity for them to mix with kids they never would have otherwise! Who knows? This could lead to a lifelong friendship.

New Activities

During the school year, things are often very routine. The day is filled with school, homework and an occasional activity. Then it’s time for a redo the next day. Have you ever wanted your child to try a new activity, but just can’t seem to squeeze it in? Camps are a great way to try things out. Is your child interested in drama, but not sure if he or she is ready to try out for a production? Try a one-week camp to see if this is something they might enjoy.

Opportunities to Explore Nature

Let’s face it. Many of our kids are “inside kids.” They spend a lot of time indoors attending school, doing homework and watching television. This leaves little time for the great outdoors. Summer is a chance to integrate some nature into the schedule. Hiking, playing in a creek or going on an animal scavenger hunt are all great ideas for outdoor fun. Many local parks offer just that to get kids interested in and familiar with nature.

More Exercise

For some, summer can lead to sitting inside, watching television or playing video games. An inactive summer is not a great summer. Think about booking a sports camp for a few weeks during the summer. Many camps are only a few hours and can provide fun activity while incorporating movement into the day. Take the summer to test out a new sport and see if this is something your child enjoys. Who knows? You may have the next star basketball player in your house!

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Venturing Outside the Comfort Zone

We tend to stick with what we know. It is hard to break out and try something new! Camp is a perfect chance to break this habit and it's also a great life lesson: try something new. You never know if you will like it or not. If your child is not a fan of the camp, don't worry! It only lasts for a small amount of time.

Decreased Screen Time

As television, video games and tablets sneak into your summer routine, find a way to break kids from this routine by scheduling a few new camps to keep them occupied. This is a great idea to keep the fun going and encourage independent thinking, physical activity and more!

Friends with Similar Interests

Does your child struggle with a friend group? Are social situations hard? Sometimes a camp can bring together people with similar interests. If your child is interested in dance, a dance camp will surround him or her with friends who have similar interests. Lifelong friendships can begin... starting at summer camp!

Leadership Building

Believe it or not, camps can also help kids build leadership skills. Group tasks and challenging activities require teamwork. As your child works with others on a project, you may see a leader emerge within them.

A Change of Pace

When summer starts, we are thrilled to have no schedules and a little well-deserved relaxation. As the summer rolls on, moms sometimes get frantic looking for new ways to ease the boredom and offer activities their children will enjoy. A camp can easily break up the monotony of the endless summer with some extra fun!

Learned Independence

Sometimes we have no idea what our kids are capable of. During camp, they learn to do things on their own. For example, take a sleep-away camp. Who would have thought your child was capable of being on their own, making their own decisions and getting along just fine without you? Independence is such a valuable trait to have!

Boosted Self-confidence

Trying new experiences can be tricky... but guess what? When your kids accomplish a new task, their self-confidence soars. Riding a horse for the first time, sleeping away from home or learning to shoot a perfect lay-up are all great ways to build confidence in all areas of life.

Fun, Fun, Fun!

Camps are fun...really fun! Make sure your child has a summer to remember by giving them the opportunity to try something new and engaging before school starts again.



CONCLUSION

Now you've read about the different types of summer camps available, and you know about the astounding benefits they offer. It's time to get going! Fire-up your laptop and begin searching for camps in your area. Don't be afraid to involve your child in the process either. They may have their own ideas for what types of activities and opportunities they'd like to try this summer. With so many options for kids of all ages, you truly can't go wrong. Here's to a great summer with memories to last a lifetime!

About the Author:

Sarah Muntel, RD, is a Registered Dietitian from Indianapolis, IN. She has worked in the field of bariatrics for the past 18 years. She has worked with both bariatric and metabolic surgery patients as well as medical weight-loss patients. Throughout her career, Sarah has worked in several bariatric centers in Indianapolis. She is currently the Bariatric Coordinator with Community Health Network. Sarah is an active member of the Obesity Action Coalition, serves on the OAC Education Committee and frequently contributes to Your Weight Matters Magazine and Blog. She also plays an active role in the Indiana State Chapter of the American Society for Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery (ASMBS). In her free time, Sarah enjoys spending time with her husband and watching her three kids play sports.



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