

Tips to help families and kids of all ages stay fit in the summer heat

With school out for the summer and temperatures rising, it's the perfect time for families to get outdoors, keep fit and have fun. It is important for everyone, especially kids, to exercise and stay healthy year round. Engaging in outdoor physical activities keeps one healthy by boosting the immune system, helping maintain a healthy weight and contributing to a good night's rest. The Ontario Children's Outdoor Charter and the Best of Ontario magazine offer a diverse range of summer outing ideas, such as exploring a park and observing plants and wildlife; playing shinny or ball hockey with neighbours; swimming in a pool or playing water sports in a lake; visiting a farm and picking some fruit; and camping under the stars. Ontarians are encouraged to stay safe outdoors by applying sunscreen, keeping hydrated and wearing appropriate equipment such as helmets or life jackets. Building healthy, active communities is a key component of Ontario's Healthy Kids Strategy and Ontario's Action Plan for Health Care. It also supports the government's economic plan to invest in people, build modern infrastructure and support a dynamic and innovative business climate. A 2011 University of Essex study showed that participating in outdoor activities improves children's mental health, increases physical activity and boosts self-esteem. Ontario is the first province in Canada to develop an outdoor charter for children and youth. An increase in 'screen-time' means that Canadian children now spend on average 8.6 hours or 62 per cent of their waking hours a day being inactive. In 2009, the economic costs associated with chronic diseases linked to unhealthy weight in Ontario was \$4.5 billion. 'Staying physically active is important for everyone's health.' commented Health and Long-Term Care Minister Dr. Eric Hoskins. 'From swimming to hiking and camping, there is no shortage of places in Ontario to be active this summer.' 'There are so many fun outdoor activities to enjoy across Ontario this summer,' observed Tourism, Culture and Sport Minister Michael Coteau. 'Whether it's playing a game of soccer or swimming in a lake ' outdoor sports are the perfect way to get exercise and stay active during the summer months.' 'Our government was the first in Canada to develop a children's outdoor charter,' said Natural Resources and Forestry Minister Bill Mauro. 'By encouraging kids to play and explore outdoors all year round, we're helping to establish healthy habits and a lifetime of appreciation for Ontario's biodiversity.'