

Daily Union Article:
Saturday, February 28
Title: Walkin' With Family

In last week's article, I shared that Walk Kansas 2017 is a state health initiative coordinated by K-State Research and Extension. It is an 8-week program where a team of 6 (or as few as 4) people join together to identify which one of three challenges they are going to set at their target.

Challenge 1) Each person reaches the minimum goal for physical activity – 2½ hours of moderate/vigorous activity per week. Collectively, the team would walk 423 miles – the distance across the state.

Challenge 2) Take a meandering trek diagonally across the state from Troy to Elkhart. Each person logs 4 hours of activity per week which would take the team 750 miles.

Challenge 3) Walk the perimeter of Kansas – 1200 miles -- with each person logging 6 hours of moderate/vigorous activity per week.

This week I want to propose a twist to this program that might spark your interest. I am sharing ideas about how to make Walk Kansas 2017 a family experience! Grab your parents, kids, siblings, or even cousins and create some friendly competition while making positive steps toward a healthier family.

Let's Get Moving!: Like so many other things our children learn from us, our children learn their attitudes and actions about exercise from what we do as their parents. If you are active, they are more likely to be active and will more likely be fit as an adult. Don't let guilt turn you off from getting up to move and become more active. Walking is a great place to start and there are many great walkways and community trails your kids would love to explore with you.

In a collaborative effort, the City of Junction City, Live Well Geary County, Junction City Area Chamber of Commerce, and the Flint Hills Metropolitan Planning Organization, has created an amazing tool to help people find their way to local Parks and Trails. You can find the Junction City Parks & Trails map posted on the Live Well Geary County website: www.livewellgearycounty.org under the Resources tab. The map will show you 18 different places your family can go to enjoy an active walk or other types of physical activity. The map gives you a legend of the length of the nine walking trails it highlights. We have trails as short as 1/3 mile to over 4.8 miles in length. It also shows you the ATA bus stops so that you can see how to get to these locations using our public transportation system and save your walking energy for the trail!

Making time for family fitness is important. The Center for Child and Adolescent Health reports that nearly 1 in 3 children in Kansas is overweight or obese. Adults in Geary County are also challenged with this health issue with 31% of the population being

identified as obese, according to the County Health Rankings data reported by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Start with realistic expectations. Taking a family walk after a meal would give you some additional family time together and help you move in to a more active lifestyle in a routine way. Walking after a meal has been found to be good for digestion, weight loss, and improve sleep. Staging the activity as an extension of your meal time will ease your family into walking together without intimidating anyone in the family. When you choose physical activities, such as walking, that don't have explicit parameters for performance, everyone in the family can feel at ease and just enjoy the time together.

You can expand to other physical activity that the family would enjoy participating in. Perhaps you could take your bikes out to one of the paths or trails. Physical activity such as bike riding, hiking, swimming, or any number of other options can be used to help you log your activity minutes in the Walk Kansas online system.

Let's Eat Healthy!: Just as with exercise, your children mimic your attitude and actions regarding healthy food choices. You and your children are partners for healthy eating. As partners, you can share food tasks – parents have certain tasks that they are better suited for and so do children. As a parent, you are responsible for selecting and buying the food; making meals and most snacks; providing regular meals and snacks; and making those meal and snack times pleasant. Your children are responsible for eating or not eating and how much food they will consume. As your children get older, they can take on some of the responsibilities you have had as the parent such as sharing in meal and snack preparation tasks.

The Walk Kansas program emphasizes healthy eating in combination with physical activity. Healthy eating, including beverage choices, plays a key role in helping you achieve and maintain good health and in reducing the risk of chronic disease throughout your life. When your family (your Walk Kansas team) reports on healthy eating choices, you each will report the amount of fruits and vegetables you consume each week. We aren't downplaying the important role of dairy foods, meat and protein or whole grains, but research shows that many Kansas families are not eating even the minimum recommended servings fruits and vegetables. Targeting your fruits and vegetable consumption toward those you can serve fresh is a great way to add color, flavor, and healthy nutrients to your daily intake.

Consider signing your family up as a team with Walk Kansas 2017 and make steps toward a healthier lifestyle. For more information about health and wellness, contact me at the Geary County K-State Research and Extension office 785-238-4161. Until next week, keep living resourcefully!