

# Fitness

## A FAMILY AFFAIR

## Build stronger bonds, have more fun and improve your family's health.

Between work, school and other obligations, it can be a real challenge to incorporate family time and exercise into our daily routines. As a family of nine, the Brennan household is well versed in this challenge, but they have a secret weapon – the YMCA.

At the beginning of the New Year, Steve and Leslie Brennan decided to make a complete lifestyle change for themselves and their seven children – beginning with clearing the junk food out of the cupboards and getting active at least 5 times a week. They knew they didn't want to go to an ordinary gym, so when someone recommended the YMCA they decided to check it out.

"We're a blended family, so we wanted to build relationships with each other, while at the same time not single out members of the family who needed to exercise," said Leslie Brennan. "We were looking for a family-friendly atmosphere that was convenient for us."

Although not all of the children were excited to get active, after a few trips to the YMCA they began asking to go more often. Now the family enjoys aqua classes, spinning and the Interactive Zone and regularly uses the fitness center equipment, including the free-weights. The two oldest daughters joined Steve and Leslie in the 12-Week Challenge, a personalized program that incorporates one-on-one training and group meetings on health and fitness topics.

"We've tried to do everything. The kids get so caught up in having fun they don't realize they are exercising," says Leslie. "Everyone knows us by name. We've met other families at the Y so now we have friends there."

The Brennan family is a great example of the impact making health and fitness a priority can have and how the YMCA is ready to help and make the process fun.

"Families are under increasing stress and struggle to balance careers, family and health and to find supportive communities. Children struggle to develop the positive values, self-esteem and healthy habits for a healthy, productive adulthood," said Chuck Harris, YMCA of South Hampton Roads President and CEO.

Studies confirm the vital role that consistent interaction and connectedness play in the long-term health and well being of individual family members. Children who develop healthy physical activity through play and eating habits while they are young are more likely to continue to lead healthy lifestyles through adulthood. Teens who eat with their families most

days have better grades and less depression and substance abuse than kids who frequently eat on their own. Strong, supportive relationships improve the life expectancy and long-term health of adults and seniors.

The latest data from the National Center for Health Statistics confirms a dramatic lifestyle health crisis in the United States. Sixty million adults—about 30 percent of the U.S. adult population—and 9 million children are obese or overweight; 16 percent of our children have Type II diabetes. According to the New England Journal of Medicine, the current generation of American children could be the first to lead shorter lives than their parents.

"The health statistics clearly illustrate 'why' it's so important for kids and adults alike to lead healthier lifestyles. At the YMCA, we believe strong families play a critical role in 'how' to make it happen," said Harris.

Combining family time with fitness sets a good example for children, showing them the importance of a healthy lifestyle. These easy steps can help you make fitness a family activity:

- § Schedule a regular time throughout the week for physical activity.
- § Take turns selecting an activity for the family to do as a group each week.
- § Help everyone find something active that makes him or her feel successful.
- § Have fun. The more fun you have together as a family, the easier it will be to make fitness a routine.

For more information on how to get your family active and healthy, visit [www.ymcashr.org](http://www.ymcashr.org).



The Brennan Family



# YMCA of South Hampton Roads

*Serving Coastal Virginia and Northeastern North Carolina*

The YMCA of South Hampton Roads is a nonprofit, community-based health and human services organization that serves over 150,000 children and families each year. More than 14% of those families receive financial assistance through the Open Doors program, helping them achieve their full potential in spirit, mind and body. The YMCA's doors are open to people of all ages, backgrounds, abilities and incomes.