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## **NEWS RELEASE for the month of September Children and Fitness**

Winning isn't everything. In fact, competition in sports is a distant second to the healthful benefits of physical activity and good nutrition. To reduce the epidemic of childhood obesity, communities and families should encourage an environment that promotes healthy physical activities and nutrition.

“Children today are less physically active than they were a generation ago and the result can be seen in their level of fitness and overall health,” said Sue Smith Deputy Director of the Otsego County Department of Health. “The prevalence of obesity among children and teenagers in the U.S. has tripled in the past 30 years among children, aged 6 to 19 years, and doubled among preschool children, aged 2 to 5 years.”

Compared with active children, inactive children weigh more, have higher blood pressure, and lower levels of heart-protective high-density lipoproteins. Unhealthy food choices, including large portions of high calorie fast foods and sugar-sweetened beverages, have become a way of life for many children.

“Today’s overweight children risk growing up to be overweight adults with serious health problems, including diabetes, heart disease, some forms of cancer and joint problems,” Sue Smith said. “Even more dangerous, these diseases, which were once thought of as adult problems, are also being seen in childhood.”

Earlier this year First Lady Michelle Paige Paterson announced a “Healthy Steps to Albany: First Lady’s Challenge” for children in schools across New York State. The health and wellness initiative challenged students to increase their physical activity, be more aware of the nutritional value of what they eat and come up with their own ways to make healthier life choices.

According to the Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans released in 2008, children and adolescents should engage in at least 60 minutes of physical activity each day to ensure good health. Playing noncompetitive sports is a great way for kids to have fun while being physically active. Jumping rope, playing kick-ball, tossing a disc, tag, and hide-and-seek are just a few of the ways to gain the benefits of physical activity.

Parents can help children be more active by being good role models. Gather the entire family and go for a bike ride or a quick walk around the neighborhood.

Limit children’s television viewing and other recreational screen time to two hours or less per day. Some easy first steps are to take the TV out of children’s bedrooms and turn off the TV when no one is watching.

Children should also be encouraged to eat more vegetables and fruits everyday and choose low-fat or fat-free milk or 100 percent juice instead of sugar-sweetened beverages. Crispy vegetables, tasty fruits and low-fat or fat-free yogurt can make healthful and delicious snack alternatives to candy and chips.

Parents and teachers should discourage their consumption of sweetened soft drinks. A person who drinks one can of sugar sweetened soda each day over the period of a year will consume 25 pounds of sugar or 49,640 extra calories, which is roughly the equivalent of 14 pounds of weight gain.

To learn more about fitness and children, visit the Healthy Steps to Albany web site at [www.healthystepstoalbany.ny.gov](http://www.healthystepstoalbany.ny.gov) or the New York State Department of Health obesity prevention web site at [www.nyhealth.gov/prevention/obesity](http://www.nyhealth.gov/prevention/obesity).

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