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PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

10 Things Parents Can Do to Help Kids Get Fit and Healthy

Stamford, CT (April 9, 2010): These tips are from the KidsGetFit.org, a partnership of United Way, the NFL, HOPSports and Sports Illustrated Kids.

As parents, we have a responsibility to teach our kids about the benefits of adopting a healthy, active lifestyle at an early age. With a few simple changes, you can become your child's greatest advocate and example - promoting eating, exercise and lifestyle strategies that the entire family can embrace.

FITNESS TIPS:

- 1. Incorporate extra movement into everyday activities.** Tiny changes can make a big difference. Dance with your kids during TV commercials. Park at the far end of the lot and race walk to the store. For every 30 minutes of homework, suggest 10 minutes of exercise (encourage them to run around the house, do jumping jacks, march in place). Exercise is just as effective in smaller increments.
- 2. Create indoor and outdoor spaces that encourage fitness.** Obesity is primarily an environmental disease so consider changing your child's environment to prompt more physical activity. Your backyard is a great place to start. Is there a swing set? Ropes or ladders that lead to a tree fort? Open spaces for playing tag? Obstacle courses for at-home decathlons? What about inside? With a little rearranging, you can transform a bedroom or basement into an activity zone. With a wide open space, kids can do anything from hula hoops to jump ropes to indoor trampolines.
- 3. Play with your kids.** Today's hectic schedules make it challenging to spend quality time with family. Fitness is a great activity to do together and while you're building strong bones and muscles, you're also building strong bonds with your children. Join a class or simply chase them around the yard. The only thing that matters is you find an activity that you all like and make it the thing you do together.
- 4. Limit TV, video games and computer use.** Studies show that a child's weight increases with the number of hours he or she spends watching television each day. Limiting screen time and removing televisions from bedrooms can be important first steps to encouraging children into a more physically active. Regulate the time your kids spend watching TV or playing computer games.
- 5. Meet them where they are.** When most of today's parents were kids, there was nothing inside the house that could compete with riding bikes, climbing trees and playing kickball until it was too dark outside to see the bases. By contrast, entertainment for many of today's kids includes instant messaging, video games and multiple cable channels. While these types of activities can lead to sedentary lifestyles, they don't have to. An increasing number of video games, for example, require kids to move their bodies to make them work. The very popular dance pad video games burn up to 500 calories in a one-hour session. Considering some

gamers spend an average of 12.2 hours a week in front of their consoles, it can only be good news that an increasing number of games are actually good for you.

NUTRITION TIPS:

- 1. Check the label.** Many prepared foods include fats or sugars that add more calories without added nutritional benefits. Learn how to read food labels so that you can choose foods that will provide your family with a nutritious and balanced diet. Focus on basic foods like lean meats, fresh fruits and vegetables, low-fat dairy and whole grains.
- 2. Go with the grain.** Whole grain foods add fiber to the diet which helps keep intestines healthy and creates a feeling of fullness. Help your child get more fiber by making the switch from refined grains to whole grains. For example, substitute brown rice for white rice and switch from cereals with refined sugar to whole-grain breakfast cereals.
- 3. Increase their intake of produce.** Filling your kids up with fruits and vegetables is a great way to get them the vitamins, minerals and other healthful compounds they need every day to be healthy. Experts recommend that everyone strive to eat at least five appropriate servings a day. Put them in easy reach by keeping fresh fruit on the counter and serving vegetables at every meal.
- 4. Start the day with breakfast.** Research shows that children who eat breakfast have a tendency to be less overweight than children who don't. Start their day off right by serving a whole-grain bread or cereal, fresh fruit and calcium-rich, low-fat milk.
- 5. Eat together.** Studies show that families who eat together, eat better. Those who regularly eat with their families are more likely than their counterparts to eat more dairy foods and whole grains and to guzzle fewer soft drinks and fried foods. But the benefits of family meals seem to go far beyond nutrition. In addition, researchers report that teens who ate seven or more meals with their families each week generally had higher grade-point averages, and were less likely to feel depressed, drink alcohol, smoke cigarettes or use marijuana than those who ate less than twice a week with their families. Ah, the gift that keeps on giving!

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ABOUT UNITED WAY OF WESTERN CONNECTICUT

United Way of Western Connecticut's mission is: "To improve lives by mobilizing the power of caring communities to create lasting change". We work to advance the common good by creating opportunities for a better life for all. Working with many partners, United Way is focused on the building blocks that we need for a good life: a quality education that leads to a stable job, income that can support a family through retirement, and good health. The towns covered within UWWC's region are Bethel, Bridgewater, Brookfield, Danbury, Kent, New Fairfield, New Milford, Newtown, Redding, Ridgefield, Roxbury, Sherman, Stamford, Warren and Washington. For more information about United Way of Western Connecticut, please visit: www.uwwesternct.org.

Note to Editor:

Please see the service area of United Way of Western Connecticut listed above. If this article will appear in a publication within other towns in Fairfield County, please also contact Donna Pfrommer at 203-339-6312.