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July 2007

Dear Colleagues:

Welcome to the 7th issue of our 2007 campaign on ***Eating Together, Playing Together***. This issue is all about the importance of **outdoor fun for healthy kids**. Our fitness handout discusses **connecting kids with nature**, while our nutrition handout offers **simple outdoor picnic ideas**.

Sometimes, almost magically, different disciplines can converge naturally on a relatively simple solution to several of our society's most complex problems. Such is the case currently with the movement that some are calling "*No Child Left Inside*." The 2005 book ***Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children From Nature-Deficit Disorder*** (by Richard Louv) identified the problem: Children spend most of their free time today in the great indoors of screen entertainment (TVs, DVDs, computers, and video games) and very little in the great outdoors of the natural world.

Now experts in disciplines as diverse as child health, child psychology, outdoor education, community recreation, environmental stewardship, sustainable development, and pollution control are considering how to reconnect children with the natural world. The concepts and programs are as diverse and creative as the groups involved, but they all touch that primal place (or *biophilia*) that connects humans to the world around us.

Here are a few sites that can connect you to this growing movement and help you find innovative ways to prevent '*Nature-Deficit Disorder*' in your family, local community, or public health program.

Children and Nature Network: www.cnaturenet.org/

Richard Louv's website with lots of links to news and programs

CT Dept. of Environmental Protection: www.nochildleftinside.org/

A state-wide example packed with real families enjoying outdoor fun

National Wildlife Federation: www.greenhour.org/

Blogs, podcasts and high-tech tips to help families enjoy nature easily

Healthy Families packets are made possible with generous support from agencies, organizations, and individuals. Please join us in thanking the 2007 sponsors listed on the left, especially our newest sponsors – the Montana affiliate of the **American Heart Association** and the **Montana Association of School Superintendents**. If you use this packet and can make a donation to support positive, practical messages for families, please contact ERM Chair Katie Bark at 406-994-5641 or kbark@mt.gov

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Five Easy Ways to Help Children Enjoy Nature

Although 'Nature Deficit Disorder' is all too common among today's video game generation, the cure is quite simple. According to the National Wildlife Federation (NWF), all it takes is a *Green Hour*™ of outdoor time every day with your children: www.greenhour.org/

★ Connect with nature in your own backyard.

If you don't have a whole hour, you can start connecting kids with nature in just 15 or 20 minutes in your own backyard. Start with a simple activity like *Nature's Rainbow*: Sit or lie quietly in one place and let children name the colors they see in nature, like sky blue, brown tree bark, yellow dandelions, and green grass.

★ Connect with nature in your neighborhood.

Kids are naturally curious about the world around them. Their sense of wonder at small discoveries can help even the most stressed-out adult relax. At any time of year, amazing things are happening right outside your door: bugs are crawling, flowers are blooming, leaves are turning color, or squirrels are hiding food.

★ Connect with nature in your local parks.

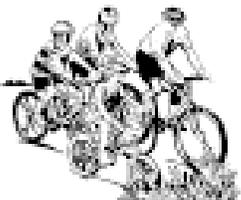
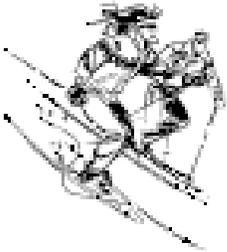
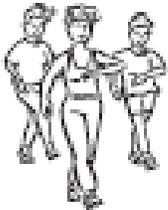
You don't have to be an expert to help kids connect with the joys of the natural world. If you want to know the scientific names of the trees or birds you see, buy a simple guidebook or borrow one from the library. Many children will be just as happy to make up names for the 'wild' things you find walking through the park.

★ Connect with nature in your state parks.

Every state park system is a network of inexpensive outdoor adventures waiting for your family. Visit the website for parks in your state (or a neighboring one) and pick a park with an intriguing natural feature, like a lake, waterfall, beach, or meadow. Plan your visit around a map, a wildlife checklist, or other outdoor fun.

★ Connect with nature in your National Parks.

From Acadia to Zion, America's National Parks are a treasure trove of outdoor and historical activities for families. Many parks have Junior Ranger programs where children can earn badges or certificates. Go online to find a park program near your home or vacation destination: www.nps.gov/learn/juniorranger.htm



EAT RIGHT MONTANA

Healthy Eating

Five Easy Ways to Pack a Perfect Outdoor Picnic

Keeping food safe and sanitary is the first step to a perfect picnic. Keep cold foods cold with an insulated cooler or bag – and plenty of frozen gel packs. Frozen water bottles or juice boxes can also keep foods cold. As they melt, they then become refreshing beverages.

● Pack chewy, hearty whole grains.

If you pack sandwiches, getting whole grain goodness is easy with whole wheat rolls or multi-grain bread. Whole grain crackers (for cheese or peanut butter) are another tasty choice. For something different, try a simple cold grain salad made with brown rice, couscous, pasta, or quinoa with chopped veggies and olive oil.

● Pack crisp, crunchy vegetables.

Pack a variety of colorful veggies onto a tray with a couple of low-fat dips, like Ranch or bleu cheese. Go raw (grape tomatoes, baby carrots, cucumber slices, peppers pieces, celery sticks, and sugar snap peas) or lightly steamed and quickly cooled (broccoli and cauliflower florets, green beans, and asparagus spears).

● Pack sweet, juicy fruit.

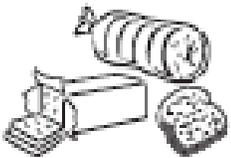
The sweet smells and flavors of summer fruits are practically a picnic necessity. Surround a container of vanilla yogurt with fruit slices for dipping (cantaloupe, kiwi, apple, and pears) – or combine their juicy goodness into a fresh fruit salad with strawberries, blueberries, peaches, nectarines, bananas, and pineapple.

● Pack creamy, delicious dairy products.

Yogurt and cheese are two easy-to-transport ways to enjoy dairy foods. Yogurt makes a yummy fruit dip (above) or a nutrient-rich, sweet dessert in flavors from key lime to chocolate mousse. An ounce or two of cheese adds layers of flavor to any sandwich. Cheese slices can also be served with crackers and fruit slices.

● Pack satisfying, flavorful protein foods.

There are dozens of delicious ways to pump protein into picnics, like slices of lean ham, roast beef, turkey, or pastrami with lettuce and tomato on whole grain breads. Tuna and chicken salad mixtures also make satisfying sandwiches. Nuts and seeds can also add protein when sprinkled onto fruit or leafy green salads.





FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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EATING TOGETHER, PLAYING TOGETHER
Celebrating Healthy Families 2007

July 1, 2007

Simple Cures for Your Family's Nature-Deficit Disorder

Montanans are lucky to live in the “last best place.” Most of us are just an hour or two from multiple outdoor recreation opportunities on lakes, rivers, and streams. We have easy access to dozens of local, state, and national parks. In our natural wonderland, is it possible that young Montanans are suffering from the condition that author Richard Louv has named “nature-deficit disorder?” Sadly, the answer is yes. Like their counterparts across the US, our children are spending more time plugged into some type of indoor technology and less time in natural outdoor activities.

“Experts in child health, behavior, and education are just beginning to document how important unstructured outdoor time is for young bodies and minds,” says Jessica Grennan, State Health Alliances Director for the American Heart Association in Montana. “A 2005 study by Kaiser Family Foundation found that Generation M (for media) spends over 44 hours per week in front of screens – and little or no time exploring the natural world around them. Rapid increases in the number of overweight children is just one of the problems that develops from our sedentary lifestyles.”

As the video game generation has become ‘de-natured,’ some researchers have begun to look at what may be missing when green space is replaced with screen space. According to the National Wildlife Federation, studies indicate that kids who regularly spend unstructured time outside:

- Play more creatively and have more active imaginations
- Have lower stress levels and may experience fewer symptoms of ADD or ADHD
- Become fitter and leaner while developing stronger immune systems
- Have greater respect for themselves, for others, and for the environment

While connecting with nature is no magic cure-all for what ails American children, spending quality outdoor time together can have some serious benefits for Montana families. “Summertime is the ideal time to get your family into the **Green Hour**™ habit,” notes Ms Grennan. “The term ‘green hour’ was coined by the National Wildlife Federation to help parents focus on 60 minutes of unstructured play and interaction with the natural world. Current guidelines from the American Academy of Pediatrics also reinforce the need for daily family-focused, active playtime.”

Think that your family is just too busy for green time? Think about your memories of outdoor fun – climbing trees with friends, hiking with dad, or fishing with mom – and reconnect with nature today:

- **Connect with nature in your neighborhood.** A backyard birdfeeder or a simple magnifying glass are inexpensive ways to help children observe the natural world within an arm’s reach.
- **Connect with nature in Montana parks.** Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks wants to be your outdoor vacation destination. Search <http://fwp.mt.gov/parks/> for parks and fun events.
- **Connect with nature in Yellowstone National Park.** Online and in person, NPS has special programs and materials for kids. Visit www.nps.gov/yell/forkids/index.htm for more info.

Past and current issues of Eat Right Montana’s monthly packets can be downloaded free at www.eatrightmontana.org/eatrighthealthyfamilies.htm