

Monday 30 January 2017

## Back to school with a running start

Hoping your kids start the school year with their best foot forward? Helping them walk or cycle to school is an ideal way to get them off to an active start.

Setting healthy examples and encouraging physical activity from a young age helps promote life-long healthy habits, explained Mandy Williams, Director of South Western Sydney Local Health District's Health Promotion Service.

"Regular physical activity is immensely beneficial for children, helping them to maintain a healthy weight, increase bone and muscle strength, improve posture and balance, develop flexibility and boost confidence and self-esteem," said Ms Williams.

"It also has the additional benefit of enhanced cognitive functioning, memory, concentration, behaviour and academic achievement for children."

The 2016 Active Healthy Kids Report Card indicates that only 19 per cent of Australian children and young people are meeting the national daily physical activity guidelines of at least 60 minutes each day.

This can be accumulated throughout the day through a combination of moderate and vigorous activities.

With increasingly busy lives time can be the biggest road block, but with some clever planning, parents can turn regular activities into healthy habits.

"Active transport is one of the most convenient ways of increasing a child's level of physical activity," said Ms Williams.

"If school isn't within walking distance, consider parking the car a good distance away from school and walking the rest of the way, or perhaps walk to the bus stop instead of driving.

"Or if it's not possible to walk or cycle to school, consider some after-school activities like team sports or even encourage them to kick a ball around with other local kids and they'll reap the social benefits."

Safety is an important consideration and supervised walks or cycling can help kids develop their knowledge of road safety and their local neighbourhood.

Children should always wear a helmet when riding their bike, and if walking, children under 10 should hold an adult's hand when around traffic and when crossing the road.