

### **Finding the After School Balance**

The start of the school year brings on more than just homework, new notebooks, and waking up early. It is a time for children to grow within their community and experience new opportunities outside of school. An osteopathic physician from Kentucky gives their advice on how to have well balanced after school activities for your children and avoid burn-out.

“It is important for children to be involved in extracurricular activities,” says the consulting physician. “This is where they pick up lifelong skills such as leadership, sense of community, healthy habits and discipline.”

Like many parents, you may struggle with pulling your kids away from the latest video game or from the comfortable confines of the family home. Our doctors have a few tips to help get your children off the couch and involved after school:

1. **Do things together.** Expose them to a few activities that you can do together. Kick a soccer ball, have a family math contest, or go to a humane society. This way you can see what they are interested in before you make the commitment.
2. **Check out the community center.** There are a lot of different activities that they can explore on their own, from sports to homework help. At a community center, your children have the opportunity to meet with other children with shared interests and possibly join a team or activity together.
3. **Listen to them.** If your children show interest in something that could turn into an activity, research it to find out how they can get involved. Even videogamers have clubs to join.

While extracurricular activities are a good way for children to exercise both their bodies and minds, develop healthy habits and stay out of trouble, it is important to remember a balance. “When children become overwhelmed, they may exhibit signs of stress, like depression and anxiety. Stress can lead to loss of sleep, missed meals, falling behind on schoolwork, and separation from friends and family,” the doctors report.

Once involved in an activity or multiple activities, check in with your children to make sure they are still enjoying themselves. “After an activity, children should be tired, but not exhausted. If you find that your child is exhausted, start to reevaluate the activities she is involved in and adjust if necessary,” says our physician.

The consulting physicians have suggested ways to prevent overloading activities:

1. **Have a test period.** Come up with a chart to log which activity your child favors the most and if it is manageable to have more than one activity.
2. **Don’t force them to do an activity just because you enjoy it.** Doing an activity to only please someone else defeats the whole purpose. If they are into something, let them shine.
3. **Encourage open communication.** “If you are worried about sending the wrong message about quitting being okay, make sure they realize that prioritizing is not quitting and commitment to one activity they really enjoy is better than giving a half-hearted commitment to a multitude of activities” says one doctor.

Being involved after school is one of the best ways for your child to grow within the community, learn discipline and create relationships with others. However, finding a balance in activities is important. “Running your children from activity to activity is a sure-fire way to exhaust them and you,” says the doctor. “Once you find the right balance, things like down time, homework, being with friends and family, and reading a book will be that much more enjoyable,” the doctors add.

Preventive medicine is just one aspect of care osteopathic physicians provide. DOs are fully licensed to prescribe medicine and practice in all specialty areas, including surgery. DOs are trained to consider the health of the whole person and use their hands to help diagnose and treat their patients.