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Kids and Breast Cancer Awareness By CWK Network Producer

"Exercise is good for many things, but I'm not sure many people are honestly aware that it can reduce the risk of breast cancer."

-Ruth O'Regan, M.D., Oncologist

Raising breast cancer awareness is rarely controversial, but there's a popular plastic wristband saying "I 'heart' boobies" that's creating quite a stir in schools around the country. The bracelets, developed by the non-profit Keep-a-Breast Foundation, might be too racy for younger students. But that hasn't stopped their concern about the risk of breast cancer – and what they can do at a young age.

Terri, 14, says, "I used to hate exercising, nobody could really get me to exercise. But now, it's kind of cool."

With the help of her mom, she's losing weight. "One of the things I know about children is that they do what you do, and they say what you say. So my job was to do whatever it was going to take to get them healthy," says her mom, Paulette.

Terri is getting healthy and she's reducing her risk of getting breast cancer. Experts say risk factors for cancer include age, family history and weight.

"If you're thin, you probably produce a little bit less estrogen," says Dr. Ruth O'Regan, an oncologist. "Exposure to estrogen is probably a major determinate of whether you're going to develop breast cancer over your lifetime."

She says exercise early in girls' lives can delay the onset of puberty, which can in turn lower hormone levels.

"One of the things we know about risk factors for breast cancer," O'Regan says, "is that the earlier you start your periods, the more likely you are to get breast cancer."

She says that exercise, along with a healthy diet low in fat and high in fiber, are the easiest ways to reduce weight - and your child's risk of developing breast cancer.

"They're obviously things that we can change," says Dr. O'Regan, "so I think it's important to actually encourage teenagers to have a healthy diet [and] take as much exercise as possible, because that's something you can actually do to prevent, to reduce your risk of developing breast cancer."

"It goes back to the same things doctors have been saying for years: diet and exercise, diet and exercise, diet and exercise," Hogan says.

What Parents Need to Know

Why is exercise important? Research has shown the following:

- Over 60 percent of American adults are not regularly active.
- Twenty-five percent of adults are not active at all.
- Only 19 percent of high school students are active for 20 minutes or more per day.
- Men are more active than women.
- Physical activity declines with age.
- Ethnic minorities are less active.
- Higher education and income are associated with more leisure-time activity.
- Obese people are usually less active than non-obese persons.

The Surgeon General's report on physical activity endorses a moderate amount of physical activity that can be obtained by doing any of the following:

- Thirty minutes of brisk walking
- Thirty minutes of lawn mowing
- Thirty minutes of leaf raking
- Fifteen minutes of running
- Forty-five minutes of volleyball

Not only does exercise keep bodies healthy and help to prevent diseases, it is also important because it can help keep minds sharp and healthy. Experts at KidsHealth have developed the following list of the benefits of exercising.

- **Exercise Makes Your Heart Happy** – Your heart is one hardworking part, pumping blood every day of your life. The heart is a muscle, and it's the strongest muscle in your body, but it's always looking to become even stronger! Since lifting weights won't help it get stronger, it relies on you to do aerobic exercise. It's a good idea for kids to do some kind of aerobic exercise two or three times a week, for 20 to 30 minutes at a time. Some excellent aerobic activities are swimming, basketball, ice or roller hockey, jogging (or walking quickly), rollerblading, soccer, cross-country skiing, biking and rowing. Even dancing, skipping, jumping rope and playing hopscotch are aerobic activities!
- **Exercise Makes Muscles** – All the muscles in your body do a fine job when you use them for easy stuff, like picking up a book or walking down the stairs. But what about using them for harder stuff, like taking long bike rides or climbing a tree? That's where exercise comes in. It makes your muscles stronger and sometimes larger. As your muscles get stronger, you can do more active things for longer periods of time. And strong muscles also help protect you from injuries when you exercise, because they give better support to your joints. Building up all different types of muscles is easy to do. For arm strength, try push-ups, pull-ups, tug-of-war or twirling a baton. Rowing in a rowboat or canoeing is great for building strong arm muscles as well. For strong leg muscles, try running, blading, skating and bike riding. And for strong stomach muscles, try sit-ups, bike riding, or even twirling a hula hoop around your waist.
- **Exercise Makes You Flexible** – Can you touch your toes easily? Most kids are pretty flexible, which means that they can bend and stretch their bodies without too much trouble. But as people get older they tend to get less flexible, so that's why it's important to exercise when you're a kid – so you can stay flexible. Plus, when you're flexible, you can be more active without having to worry about getting sprains and strained muscles. It's easy to find things to do for good flexibility. Tumbling and gymnastics are great ways to become more flexible. Yoga and dancing, especially ballet, also increase flexibility. Karate, tae kwon do and other martial arts are great for flexibility, too.
- **Exercise Keeps You at a Healthy Weight** – Every time you eat food, your body does the same thing: it uses some of the nutrients in the food as fuel. It burns these nutrients to give us energy or calories. You need calories for all of your body's functions, whether it's things you think about doing, like brushing your teeth, or things you never think about doing, like breathing. So it's important for kids to get all the calories they need from the foods they eat. But if the body isn't able to use all the calories that are coming from food, it stores them away as fat. And that's why exercise helps keep a child at a weight that's right for his/her height, by burning up extra calories. When you exercise, your body uses that extra fuel to keep you going strong.
- **Exercise Makes You Feel Good** – Exercising is a most excellent way to feel happy, whether you're exercising on your own or with a group. If you've had a tough day at school, a fight with your friend or just feel kind of blue, exercising can help you feel better. That's because when you exercise, your body can release endorphins, which are chemicals that create a happy feeling in your brain. Plus, when you're breathing deeply during exercise and bringing more air into your lungs, your brain appreciates the extra oxygen. And when you're active and running around, sometimes it's hard to think about just what was bothering you. Exercise can make you feel better about yourself, too. When you are stronger and more capable of doing things, you can feel pretty proud – whether you scored the winning goal or hula-hooped for an hour straight!

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