

NEIGHBORS

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Miami Herald

STRIKE THE POSE:
Alexa Roche, 3, and her mother Robyn, of Palmetto Bay do the Downward Dog pose during a basic yoga class at Palmetto Bay Branch Library.

SMART START TO THE SCHOOL YEAR



MARSHA HALPER/MIAMI HERALD STAFF

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SMART START

to the School Year

Get your kids off to a healthy beginning with local fitness and nutrition programs.

BY ADRIANNE RICHARDSON
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Making sure kids eat the right foods and exercise during the school year is a tough task for most parents. But, for one 12-year-old, maintaining a healthy lifestyle has become part of her daily routine.

Aisha Chebbi, a seventh-grader at George Washington Carver Middle School in Coconut Grove, started by giving up soda.

"Sprite was my favorite soda," Aisha said. "Some people don't know that they are really bad for you, they can cause heart disease and Type 1 diabetes."

The next step came when she joined a before-school, hour-long exercise program. She arrived at school at 7:45 a.m. to fit the class into her school day, which began at 9 a.m. "This is where I came up with a lot of ideas about how to make kids healthier."

Aisha wrote a letter to first lady Michelle Obama, telling her of two initiatives she wanted to develop for students throughout the county: "8 before 8" and "No Sugar for Breakfast."

In 8 before 8, Aisha wants to emphasize that kids should drink eight glasses of water a day. Aisha carries a water bottle to school so she can hydrate throughout the day. The No Sugar for Breakfast program would make parents and students aware of healthier options for breakfast other than sugary cereals.

"If kids have sugar for breakfast, they are prone to have more sugar and fats in their diet," said Aisha, who switched from sugary cereals to eating oatmeal or eggs, fresh fruit and drinking milk or water.

After school, she began swimming and playing tennis at a local park.

Obama responded to Aisha's letter, encouraging her to join Obama's Let's Move! initiative. The Alliance for a Healthier Generation recently selected



PRACTICES WHAT SHE PREACHES: Aisha Chebbi, 12, is encouraging students to live healthier lifestyles.

Aisha to serve as a Youth Ambassador on the 2014-15 Youth Advisory Board, which focuses on reversing the childhood obesity epidemic.

"When you're more active and eat better, you feel better and you do better in school," she said. "You're more confident."

Here are places and programs in Miami-Dade County for kids to get on a healthier track.

DEERING ESTATE AT CUTLER

Those who love yoga will want to attend the Vinyasa Yoga for Children program at the Deering Estate at Cutler, 16701 SW 72nd Ave., Palmetto Bay. Six-week sessions run for three age groups: up to 6, 7-9 and 14-17. Classes start Aug. 17 for the 6-and-under group, Aug. 20 for 7- to 9-year-olds and Aug. 22 for the teens. Cost is \$60 for all sessions and an annual registration fee of \$12. For information, visit deeringestate.org.

YMCA OF GREATER MIAMI

The YMCA of Greater Miami focuses on family wellness.

"If you see a very fit adult, you'll probably see a very fit child," said Garrett Brolsma, a director at the South Dade YMCA. "While the parents are building



MATIAS J. OCNER/MIAMI HERALD STAFF

BURNING CALORIES: From left, Hannah Brearley, 10, Kamani Hepburn, 10 and Sophie Vesga, 9, doing jumping jacks at South Dade YMCA during Kid Fit.

healthy habits, the kids are building healthy habits and it builds generations of healthy habits."

Programs for kids include youth sports, swimming and the activity zone, where parents can drop off their kids while they work out.

For Aleshia Hepburn, who attends the South Dade Y for Zumba and step classes, dropping off her daughter Kamani, 10, has made a real difference.

"She has fallen in love with this. Even on the days when I don't want to come, she helps me get here," said Hepburn, who has been going to the Y for almost two years. "Her progress from when she started to now is just amazing. PE and school doesn't give her as much as she gets here."

Memberships and price range by location, starting at \$30 a month for students to \$80 a month for a family. Finan-

cial assistance is available for those who qualify. For a list of facilities, visit ymcamiami.org.

BOYS AND GIRLS CLUBS OF MIAMI-DADE

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, childhood obesity has more than doubled in children and quadrupled in adolescents in the past 30 years. The Boys and Girls Clubs of Miami-Dade is trying to reverse that trend, motivating kids through nutrition and exercise programs.

Triple Play, for example, works with kids 6-18 by increasing their daily physical activity, as well as educating them about smart food choices. The club provides sports and physical activities throughout the school year. Tackle football and cheerleading are among the



FITNESS FOR ALL AGES practicing the Wa

most popular sports

Alex Rodriguez-Roy believes that incorporating lifestyle builds lifetime fitness. "There's a lot more stamina to running the stamina to run play soccer," he said. "When you're exercising, you feel better about yourself, you have more self-esteem, you learn to work in teams, you accept wins and failures, you learn to live." For information, visit bgcmia.org.

YOGA AT THE LIBRARY

With an upcoming program with testing, studying and other activities, student



MARSHA HALPER/MIAMI HERALD STAFF

YOGA: Ana Miranda, front, leads a basic yoga class for children and adults on Aug. 9 at Palmetto Bay Branch Library. The class is in the tree pose. Future classes will be at 11 a.m. Aug. 23 and Aug. 30 at the library, 17641 Old Cutler Rd., Palmetto Bay.

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ga at 11 a.m. Aug. 23 and Aug. 30 at Palmetto Bay Branch Library, 17641 Old Cutler Rd. There's also a free yoga for kids ages 6-14 at West Dade Regional Library, 9445 Coral Way, from 6 to 7 p.m. Wednesdays. For those 18 and older, yoga classes are from 7 to 8 p.m. Wednesdays. For information about other fitness programs at local libraries, visit mdpls.org.

MIAMI-DADE PARKS, RECREATION AND OPEN SPACES

Next week, the Miami-Dade County Parks, Recreation and Open Spaces Department will begin its Fit2Play: Health, Wellness and Obesity Prevention After-School program for kids ages 6-14 at 35 parks.

Each session will begin with Sports, Play and Active Recreation for Kids (SPARK) activities and is followed by homework help. The program runs from 2 to 6 p.m. weekdays. It begins Friday and runs through June 4. Fees range from \$25 to \$35 a week; financial aid is available for families who qualify. For a list of participating parks, visit miamidade.gov/parks.

FITNESS AT JEWISH COMMUNITY CENTER

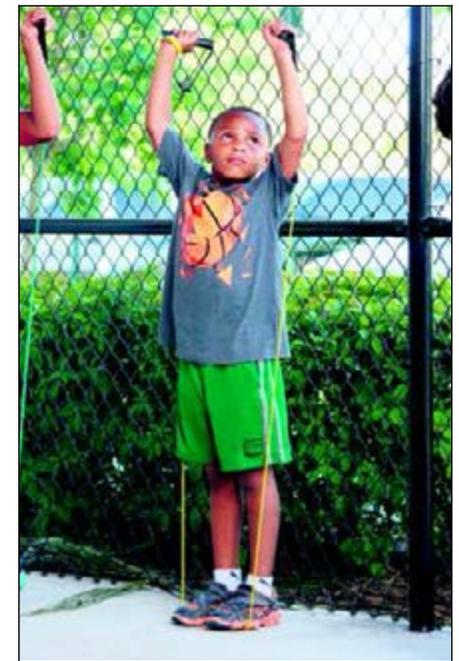
For kids who are overweight or at risk of childhood obesity, Alper Jewish Community Center, 1155 SW 112th Ave., Miami, offers an eight-week program called Team Fit for kids ages 8-12.

Kids work out with trainers for an

hour every Tuesday and Thursday afternoon. Parents are required to attend nutritional sessions from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday, while the children attend one hour of nutrition class and one hour of sports, including swimming, baseball, kung fu, TRX suspension training and Pilates.

"The only way the children will succeed after the program is over is with family support," said Meg McCarthy, the fitness center director.

Sessions run from Oct. 10 to Dec. 19. Kids must undergo a health screening to be accepted into the program. The cost of the program is \$205 per child with an \$80 rebate after the Saturday classes are completed. The fee includes membership to the fitness center for the family



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STRETCHING IT OUT: James Mondesire, 7, does resistance stretching during the Kid Fit program at South Dade YMCA.



NATALIE FERTIG/MIAMI HERALD STAFF

LONG-DISTANCE RUNNER: Reed Ramirez, 8, runs a relay/obstacle course organized by Miami-Dade County's Fit2Play initiative at North Trail Park in the Fontainebleau area.

during the eight-week program. Go to www.alperjcc.org.

In North Miami Beach, the Michael-Ann Russell Jewish Community Center, 18900 NE 25th Ave., offers a range of fitness and youth sports programs, including an after-school conditioning program for kids in grades 3-6, an aquatics program and gymnastics and tennis. For information, visit www.marjcc.org or call 305-932-4200 and ask for Danny at ext. 136. Sessions start the week of Aug. 25.