

The Chicago Tribune PARENT TO PARENT

Miss Lori turns the 'f' in fitness to fun

By Heidi Stevens Tribune staff reporter July 8, 2007



One of the saddest things I've read recently is this sobering fact: For the first time in the history of the United States, the current generation of children will likely have shorter life spans than their parents. A 2005 study concluded that childhood obesity is rapidly on the rise, and its complications—Type 2 diabetes, heart disease, kidney failure, cancer—are expected to cut short the lives of a group who should be benefiting from technological and scientific advances their parents and grandparents never dreamed of.

It's easy to see how we got here: It's cheap and easy (and kind of fun, frankly) to eat junk food. Schools are cutting down on gym and recess. Television, video game and computer usage keep climbing at a steady pace. But we owe it to our kids to put up a fight. And for a warrior on the front lines, look no further than Miss Lori.

Perky PBS personality Lori Holton Nash, known to her fans as the host of the PBS Kids Preschool Block, is on a mission to get young kids moving. "I want to make the 'f' in fitness stand for fun," Holton Nash says. "You can get down to the physiological level and the biochemical things that happen to you when you exercise, but children just need to understand that the more fit you are, the more things you can participate in. The more joy you can get from your life."

Holton Nash who lives in Chicago, combines music and theatrical elements to get kids off their feet, so that even watching her on TV is hardly a passive experience. Her performances sample everything from calypso to hip-hop to the Electric Slide. You can check her out yourself at 2:30 p.m. Sunday at Taste of Chicago, where she'll be performing on the Fun Time stage. She also has a new CD, "Music 'n' Movement Together," scheduled for an August release.

Of course it's going to take more than a CD or a single performance to kick our unhealthy habits (especially when said performance is at the deep-fried, calorie-soaked Taste). So Holton Nash encourages parents to turn physical activity into a year-round family affair. "Everyone talks about family time at the dinner table," she says. "I absolutely champion the idea of family time, but I'm also in favor of it happening up on your feet, out of doors, doing activities together. Take it beyond the realm of food. It's equally important to be physically engaged."

And don't think physical activity has to equal sports. Children who don't show an affinity for soccer or baseball or other competitive pursuits should still be encouraged to get moving, Holton Nash says. Take a walk. Take a bike ride. Take a class. (The Menomonee Club in Lincoln Park offers music, dance and art classes built on Holton Nash's CAMPUS curriculum—Celebrating Artistry Musicality Physicality United Successfully.)

"Take the side-by-side competitiveness out of it and strive for the best *you* can do," she says. "We're not measuring ourselves against our neighbors or our idols. It's hard enough to be a kid. "We need to reinforce to children that if they keep going and do their best, that is something we celebrate."