



An App a Day Keeps the Doctor Away

Keep Kids Engaged in Healthy Living

by Julianne Hale

In today's technology-fueled society, kids spend many hours of their free time staring at smartphones or tablets instead of exploring nature, riding bikes or playing outdoor games with their friends. Rather than just imposing radical reductions in screen time, parents and caregivers can meet youngsters halfway by adding apps to their handheld devices that provide tips on healthy eating, exercise and behavior. Here are five that are fun for kids and promote healthy lifestyle choices.

Super Stretch Yoga HD. Super Stretch is the primary character in this yoga adventure in which players are encouraged to, "Create a peaceful, balanced life by living a NAMASTE mission: Nothing is impossible; Always be honest; Make the world a better place; Act with kindness; Share with others; Trust and believe in yourself; and Enjoy and have fun." Creator and founder Jessica Rosenberg, of Minneapolis, Minnesota, explains, "I translated a curriculum that I've been using for kids into an 'edutainment' app that combines gaming and real-life kids

as characters that bring yoga to life." Players are challenged to master the skills presented by each of the game's 12 main characters, increasing awareness of breathing and other aspects of how the body works, plus promoting self-esteem. *Free in the iTunes App Store.*

If, the Emotional IQ Game. An adventure game inspired by *If*, a well-known poem by Rudyard Kipling, players go on a quest through Ziggurat, a fantasy world where they enlist energy creatures called Vims to rid their avatars of dark energy. Youngsters are challenged to complete missions using emotional language. The character traits required to complete the tasks include patience, teamwork and other skills that help kids build emotional intelligence. *Free in the iTunes App Store.*

Smash Your Food. Nutritionist Marta De Wulf, from Bellevue, Washington, felt compelled to develop her innovative app when she realized that while kids understand that certain foods contain too much sugar, fat or carbs, they have

no idea how the information pertains to them.

The award-winning app "allows children to input their age, gender and level of physical activity to measure their individual caloric need," says De Wulf. "When they choose a food to 'smash' and see that eight grams of sugar cubes are in a can of soda, they're able to process healthy food information."

Smash Your Food features audio/video of actual food smashing. "Kids are sensorial and different kinds of learners. It's more effective than using cartoon images," she observes. *It's \$2.99 in the iTunes App Store.*

Oh, Ranger! Park Finder. Instead of vaguely suggesting that kids put down their electronic devices and head outdoors, why not ask them to choose an adventure for the whole family? Using the Oh, Ranger! Park Finder app, kids can search for nearby outdoor recreation areas from a comprehensive database of national parks, state parks, national forests, wildlife refuges, Bureau of Land Management sites and U.S. Army Corps recreation areas. Kids can further seek out specific activities from 20-plus categories that range from birdwatching and hiking to boating and camping. *Free in the iTunes App Store or Google Play.*

Kids Making Healthy Choices. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control reports that rates of childhood obesity have doubled in the past 30 years. This kid- and parent-friendly app is designed to help. It springboards from San Diego, California's Merilee Kern's children's book of the same title. Embedded via an e-reader, kids can play games, print coloring sheets and explore healthy recipes while parents check out the news section and resource page for links with information for keeping youngsters healthy.

"Surveys show that parents often don't realize that their child has a weight problem," notes Kern. "It's important to discuss this topic within the family, and the app helps facilitate this in a non-threatening, helpful way." *It's \$2.99 in the iTunes App Store.*

Julianne Hale writes and edits for Natural Awakenings franchise magazines and blogs about motherhood at AnotherGrayHair.wordpress.com.

Healthy Web Edutainment

ZisBoomBah.com. “Parents typically spend 90 percent of their grocery budget on products from the inside aisles of stores,” says Karen Laszlo, founder of this award-winning website, which teaches kids about the value of food in the outside (produce, dairy and meat) aisles and how to choose fresh, whole foods to incorporate into kid-friendly recipes for the whole family.

PBSKids.org/itsmylife. Designed for teens and tweens, this PBS Kids Go! website teaches children to make responsible decisions about pertinent issues, including drugs, alcohol, anorexia and bulimia, and how to objectively view celebrities, dating and the challenges of puberty. Visitors can find reliable, accurate information about subjects they may not be comfortable discussing with adults or peers.

NPS.gov/WebRangers. The National Park Service online Web Rangers program enables kids to create a customizable ranger experience and discover national parks and historic sites around the country.