

The Daily Parent

A NEWSLETTER FOR WORKING PARENTS

SHOW THEM THE MOVES: Get Your Children Active for Life

Children *always* seem to be on the move. They're wiggling, crawling, jumping, running, hopping, or skipping. It's hard to believe that even with all their moving and playing, many children do not get enough physical activity.

The Institute of Medicine says that over the past 30 years, the number of overweight preschool children, ages 2 to 5, has more than doubled, and for children 6 to 11 years, that number has tripled. Nine million children over age 6 are obese or overweight. Children's obesity is now a major national medical concern.



There can be many reasons for children being overweight. The two biggest reasons are "what they are eating" and "what they are doing." Not being active enough is one reason young children are overweight. So, how much physical activity do children really need?

How Much Movement Do Children Need?

The National Association for Sport and Physical Education has guidelines for children to be at their

best fitness level. There are guidelines for infants and toddlers, preschoolers, and school-age children as to how much physical activity is best for their health and development.

How Much Activity for Infants?

You may wonder, what kinds of physical activities do babies need? Every kind of activity with babies is important to their overall development. Every movement encourages brain activity, which, in turn, plays a part in cognitive, emotional, and social development.

For example, babies or toddlers who spend too much time in strollers, play pens, car seats, or other confined spaces, are not having the opportunities they need to explore, learn, and develop. Too much time spent not *moving* as a baby or toddler can lead to the habit of not being physically active.

At this age, infants need to be rolling over, crawling, walking, pulling themselves up, exploring their surroundings, interacting with parents and others. Remember activity just means doing something, not lying down or being still.

It is recommended that every day, infants should:

- Spend time with a caregiver (parent, grandparent, child care provider) who will provide activities that involve some movement. This includes holding, rocking, and carrying the baby around.
- Be taken to new environments, such as being able to explore different rooms, go outside, be taken on a stroll, and see what other children or people are doing.

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- Be able to move as much as possible. Spend as little time as needed in a car seat, stroller, play pen, or anything else that stops them from being able to stretch their legs, kick, roll over, and so on.

How Much Activity for Toddlers/Preschoolers?

Toddlers and preschoolers are already active, right? They run, jump, throw, and kick. This is true, but, they have to have the chance to do all this. These skills develop because they are given time and opportunity. Too many children are not getting enough time to be physically active in child care and in school. The younger children usually want to be active—getting them to be active is usually not a problem.



It is recommended that every day, toddlers and preschoolers should:

- Have structured or planned physical activity—for toddlers, at least 30 minutes; for preschoolers, at least one hour. Of course, more is better. And it doesn't have to be continuous. It could be throughout the day, but as long as it adds up to 30 minutes or an hour, it's okay.
- Be engaged in some sort of movement or physical activity, structured or on their own, throughout the day. Except when they are sleeping, no more than 60 minutes at a time should go by without them being active.
- Have both indoor and outdoor time to move around and use their large muscles. This includes kicking and throwing a ball, climbing on playground equipment, riding a bicycle, skipping and jumping.

It is important to note that children in child care need to be in settings where the child care program plans enough appropriate physical activity throughout the day. Parents should ask about what kinds of daily physical activities are planned when looking for child care.

How Much Activity for Young School-Age?

School-age children need even more physical activity than toddlers and preschoolers. As their bodies are growing, they need more food, more energy, and more activity. Physical activity should be a part of their ordinary, everyday activities. Whether activities are structured such as gym class, or unstructured, such as raking leaves, it's all a part of what these young school-age children need to be healthy and fit. Although there is a structured physical education program in every school system, it isn't enough. Some schools only have physical education classes twice a week. Playground time is usually limited to 15 or 20 minutes at a time.

It is recommended that every day, school-age children should:



- Get at least 30 minutes to one hour of physical activity, with 15 minutes of ongoing vigorous activity (gym class, recess, organized sport, or playing outside.)
- Get at least another *additional* hour of physical activity that is not structured and hopefully "fun," such as building towers, taking a hike, going on treasure hunt, or playing tag.
- Be encouraged to be active through whatever it takes to encourage them. Do lots of activities with them.

Adults and Children Active Together

Parents (and other primary caregivers in children's lives) are the most influential people in children's lives. Being active and staying active is a prime example of where as a parent you will greatly influence your child's fitness habits. When trying to make sure your child is getting enough activity, make sure you make it a family effort. Fitness is not just doing formal exercises, it's moving and stay moving for a period of time. We can all find something we like to do that involves movement, and that's the key to being active for a lifetime.

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Make family time a regular part of your day or week, and include something physically active as part of it. Try these family fun activities to keep everyone moving:




- Go bowling
- Play volleyball, catch, kickball, tennis or whatever activity is fun for you and your family; take lessons together to learn a new sport
- Have water day in your backyard (when's the last time you ran through a sprinkler?)
- Walk around the mall, a carnival or park

- Take a nature hike
- Have hula hoop contests
- Learn a new dance and put on some music
- Take a ball outside and just play

You already know that as a parent, it is not easy to find time for beneficial physical activity in your own now very busy lives. But it has never been more important because your children need to see that **you** see it as important (but fun). The habits children start early in life will show up later in life. The more

PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES TO DO WITH YOUR CHILD

Here are some suggestions on what physical activities would be appropriate for different age groups:

INFANTS	TODDLERS/ PRESCHOOLERS	YOUNG SCHOOL-AGERS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hold, rock • Carry from place to place • Play peek-a-boo • Play pat-a-cake • Take on walks • Take to playground to watch other children  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alternate positioning—place infant on stomach and back • Take “Mommy and Me” exercise (yoga, swimming) or music classes at local recreation centers or places that offer activities for children and families • Sing and dance with baby • Provide safe space for exploration, crawling, pulling themselves up 	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play music and move—march, hop, spin • Play follow the leader • Go to playground and supervise equipment play • Run around at the park • Take a walk at the mall • Waterplay—run through the sprinklers • Let them help you ‘clean up’—many preschoolers love to sweep, pick things up and put them in the trash 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dance • Bike rides/scooter rides • Do chores around house or in yard (clean room, fold laundry, wash the car, sweep, water the yard, rake or pick up leaves, walk the dog) • Hike, walk • Play volleyball, soccer, swimming, gymnastics, martial arts, kickball • Play outdoors or on playground with friends • Throw frisbee, play with hula hoop, skate 

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active a child is early in life, the more likely he will be active as an adult.

Being more active does take more planning, but stick with it and you'll find that your children are in better health, will learn to like at least once activity, and you may find that you enjoy it more than you thought.

For More Information

- **Childhood Obesity in the United States: Facts and Figures, Fact Sheet, September 2004. The Institute of Medicine.** (www.iom.edu)
- **Kidshealth.org**, www.kidshealth.org, provides doctor-approved health information about children from before birth through adolescence. Get more ideas about how you can get your children (and yourself) active.
- **Kidnetic.com**, www.kidnetic.com/parents, is a resource for raising a healthy child and offers a special section just for parents. Get the facts about

children and physical activity, healthy eating and self-esteem.

- **American Academy of Pediatrics**, www.aap.org, has a parenting corner with health topics of interest to parents of children of all ages. As an organization of 60,000 pediatricians, whether you're looking for general information related to child health or for more specific guidelines concerning a pediatric issue, this site will most likely have what you need.

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