HELPING YOUR CHILDREN BECOME PHYSICALLY ACTIVE

An active body is a healthy body!

An active lifestyle and maintaining a healthy weight can benefit children in many ways. It may promote proper bone and muscle development, promote heart health, and help to reduce risk of overweight and obesity. Active children are less likely to put on weight or develop the early stages of heart disease. Being active can also help children feel happier, perform better at school, enjoy life and establish healthy habits early so they grow into active adults.

Given the clear benefits of physical activity, why does it seem so difficult for parents to make regular activity a part of our children’s daily lives? Changes in lifestyle are a big reason many adults and children are less physically active today:

- Modern technology (cars, escalators, garage door openers, power lawn mowers, etc.) have made it easy to take daily physical activity out of our lives.
- The popularity of television, computers and video games at home means that we spend more and more of our leisure time sitting.
- With many parents today concerned about safety outside the home, fewer children play outside or walk or ride bikes to school.

Making physical activity part of your family’s routine can lead to better family harmony and children who are happier, healthier and more confident. Here are some suggestions on how to get your kids active:

**How Much is Enough?**

For your children to enjoy the benefits of physical activity, experts agree a good target to work toward is a total of 60 minutes or more of moderate to vigorous activity a day. The following chart can help you identify which activities fall into this category, and also has examples of muscle-strengthening and bone-strengthening activities:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Physical Activity</th>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Adolescents</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moderate-intensity aerobic</td>
<td>Active recreation such as walking, hiking, skateboarding, rollerblading or biking</td>
<td>Active recreation such as canoeing, hiking, cross-country skiing, skateboarding, rollerblading</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Walking or biking to school</td>
<td>Brisk walking or biking (stationary or road bike)</td>
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<td>House and yard work such as sweeping or pushing a lawn mower</td>
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<td>Playing games that require catching and throwing, such as baseball/softball, basketball and volleyball</td>
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1. Spend time at the local swimming pool. Don’t sit and watch the kids swim—join them in swimming or diving.
2. Wash your pet.
3. Get around on skates.
4. Limit television and video games to less than 2 hours a day.
5. Stretch before and after sleeping.
6. Do some gardening, or tend to your houseplants.
7. Put music on and make household chores fun.
8. Skip the elevator or escalator and walk up and down stairs whenever you can.
9. Choose games that require you to move.
10. Hide things and have a treasure hunt with your children.

Physical activity is a good way for the whole family to spend time together. Here are 25 ideas:

1. Wash your pet.
2. Get around on skates.
3. Limit television and video games to less than 2 hours a day.
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### Type of Physical Activity

#### Vigorous-intensity aerobic
- Active games involving running and chasing, such as tag
- Biking
- Jumping rope
- Martial arts, such as karate
- Running
- Sports such as ice or field hockey, baseball/softball, football/soccer, basketball, swimming
- Vigorous dancing
- Aerobics
- Cheerleading or gymnastics

#### Muscle-strengthening
- Games such as tug of war
- Modified push-ups (with knees on the floor)
- Resistance exercises using body weight or resistance bands
- Rope or tree climbing
- Sit-ups
- Swinging on play-ground equipment/bars
- Gymnastics

#### Bone-strengthening
- Games such as hop-scotch
- Hopping, skipping, jumping
- Jumping rope
- Running
- Sports such as gymnastics, basketball, volleyball, tennis

### Children

11. Organize competitions between parents, teachers and students.
12. Straighten your room, closet or that full dresser—bend, stretch, squat.
13. Put on music, sing and dance.
14. Get up an hour earlier to exercise at home or take a walk or go running.
15. Challenge each other on the number of sit-ups done in a week.
16. Walk the dog.
17. Focus on exercises that increase your flexibility.
18. Go for a bike ride with your kids.
19. Play hide and seek with your children in the house.
20. Clean out the storage room or garage.
21. Use a large ball for exercising.
22. Plan a play date with your neighbor’s children to go for a walk or play in the park.
23. Re-decorate your home.
24. Paint the walls or doors yourself.
25. If you have space, create your own gym.

### Adolescents

- Active games involving running and chasing, such as flag football, soccer
- Biking
- Jumping rope
- Martial arts such as karate
- Running
- Sports such as tennis, ice or field hockey, baseball/softball, football/soccer, basketball, swimming
- Vigorous dancing
- Aerobics
- Cheerleading or gymnastics

- Games such as tug of war
- Push-ups
- Resistance exercises with exercise bands, weight machines, hand-held weights
- Rock climbing
- Sit-ups
- Cheerleading or gymnastics

- Hopping, skipping, jumping
- Jumping rope
- Running
- Sports such as gymnastics, basketball, volleyball, tennis
**Golden Tips**

**Sometimes, it's not worth fighting a battle if it means losing the war.**

At the end of the day, the most important thing is that you communicate with your children and let them know that you love and support them. Sometimes parents have to let the child take the lead in selecting activities that are appealing.

**Avoid your children becoming “parent deaf” so that they stop listening to you.**

This happens when advice turns to nagging.

**Provide five times more positive praise and feedback than you think is needed.**

Children need more praise and positive encouragement than we think. Encourage your children to praise you occasionally too.

**Use rewards such as money, sweets and other treats very sparingly.**

They are best used occasionally for special achievements.

**Remember: Even when parents do all the right things, it does not always work out the way they want it to. That’s life.**

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**Motivating Children to Be Physically Active**

How do you know which types of physical activity are best for your child? As a first step, look at what he or she already likes to do, since children will take part in activities if they are fun. Some activities like free play are always fun, but sometimes it is not clear what makes children enjoy one activity and not another. It really comes down to the preference of the individual child.

To figure out what is right for your child, remember that physical activity comes in many different forms, from free play in the park or backyard to organized competitive sports. Consider a variety of activities for your child, rather than relying on a single type, to meet the 60 minutes a day goal.

- An 11 year-old child can walk a half a mile or more to school and back and play soccer in the school playground each day to get most of their recommended activity.
- For a 13 year-old child, dance classes and sports may be the bigger part of the day’s physical activity.
- For a 15 year-old adolescent, an hour-long walk, biking or other sports each day may satisfy almost all his/her basic activity needs.

Take the time to identify appropriate and enjoyable activities so that your child can build on his/her activity profile.

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**Young Children (6 to 9 Year-Olds): The Skill-Hungry Years**

**Form habits**

Young children can get most of their activity from play – like running and chasing – rather than from organized sports or exercise. Six- to nine-year olds generally cannot keep up with endurance-type activities for long periods, and furthermore, they don’t see much sense in it. At this age they can be sharpening their basic physical skills like jumping, skipping, throwing, climbing, kicking, catching, bike riding and swimming. Coordination, agility and balance are developed during these early years and help children enjoy formalized sports in later years.

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**Young Teenagers (10 to 13 Year-Olds): The Social Years**

**Consolidate habits**

Once children are comfortable with basic-level physical skills, they are more likely to enjoy more formalized sports and activities as they get older. The early teenage years are a good time for children to explore new activities such as baseball, soccer, martial arts, and dance. These types of activities will involve more focused skills, will help children meet new friends, and can produce a real sense of achievement.
Make sure you give positive feedback and support. Young teenagers need encouragement to stay interested and involved in activities, continue to develop their skills, and not get left behind. This is especially true for girls, who generally have less confidence in their physical abilities than boys.

**Older Teenagers (14 to 18 Year-Olds): Learning to be Grown-Ups**

*Do not lose acquired habits*

For teenagers of this age, fitness may take on a different meaning because they are generally more interested in how they look and how they are viewed by their friends. Many teenagers are still trying to figure out who they are and what kind of person they want to be. By encouraging your child in activity, sports, and fitness, he or she will develop a strong sense of self-worth and will be more confident to join in organized activities.

**Set the Right Example**

When it comes to physical activity, you can be a good role model for your children even if you’re not an athlete. What is more helpful is that you show your children that you consider daily physical activity to be important, by joining your children in games, kicking a ball with them, taking them swimming or biking, or being active during holidays and on vacation.

**Sources:**


González-Gross M, Fuentes F. Get off the bus one stop early and 99 more ideas for an active life. Spain, Madrid. 2010.